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BEFORE the CRISIS

FREDERICK BLOUNT MOTT

Before the Crisis

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BY

FREDERICK BLOUNT MOTT

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK AND LONDON MCMIV

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CHAPTER I

THE night was dark and still. Twelve horsemen rode fast towards a ray of light, that streamed from the window of a small shanty, across the winding bed of the Pottawattomie, and out over the prairie.

As they drew near, the wailing cry of a child within the house rose plaintively above the patter of hoofs and jangling of spurs. The men halted, and presently the captain sent forward a young negro on foot.

There was a moment of suspense when he reached the door, then his timid knocking was answered by the sharp ping of a rifle, resounding from the fringe of timber along the creek. The negro flung up his arms with a piercing cry, and fell in a heap.

The mounted men were immediately thrown into complete panic, with cries of "Brown's Raiders!" "The Army of the Free-Staters!" "Sharpe's Rifles from Lawrence!" They turned their horses, and galloped for shelter.

"Halt!" commanded the captain, his horse rearing and wheeling across the road, impatient to follow its companions. "Halt! or, by ——, I'll riddle you as you

run!" Cocking his heavy horse pistol, the enraged leader dashed after his men.

In a little while, the door of the shanty was cautiously opened, and the figure of a tall, well-built youth appeared against the flickering lamplight within.

Presently he stepped out, but discovering the fallen negro, stopped, and leaned over him.

Meanwhile, the frightened horsemen, rallied by their leader, quietly returned, and entered the house from the rear.

Before the young man, leaning over the prostrate negro, was aware of what had taken place, he was struck down with the butt of a musket swung through the open door behind him.

"Pull him in here, Chute! Pull him in here!" cried a voice from behind. "Let's cut his abolition head off!"

Willing hands, reaching through the doorway, seized his feet and dragged him in.

"Hands off!" cried Chute, "Hands off! No robbing me of my rights." He flung his musket on the floor, and drew a huge bowie knife from his belt, at the same moment catching in his left hand the hair of the prostrate figure. As he lifted the unconscious face from the ground, its fairness was apparent, even in the dim lamplight.

"Hold on, Chute!" cried the leader of the party, advancing as fast as his excessive fatness, and short stature would allow. "Hold on! What have you got there?

That's not our man! This ain't Ottawa Jones! Look at his hair! Look at his blamed skin!"

"Cut his d—d abolition head off, Chute!" shouted two or three of the more unruly members of the raiding party.

"You hounds you! If I ain't captain of this company say so!"

"Oh, go on, old Buckskin! He's a Free-Stater or he wouldn't be here."

Others joined in the clamour, but Chute was so mightily surprised at the appearance of his prisoner, who, regaining consciousness, opened his eyes upon his captor, that he stuck the knife back in his belt, and whipping out a rope, noosed it quickly round the young man's neck and arms, chuckling at the same time.

"Bet y'ur boots, Capt'n, this young 'un is a Yankee sympathiser. He's no settler; ther's money may be made of him, eh!"

"Pinion him; we'll rid the state of his vote anyway. Stein! Jute! Poss! drag out the old woman here, and these yelping brats, d—d halfbreeds, line 'em up in the road. If there's any more sniping from the timber yonder, why, they're already clad in heavenly garments, ain't they?"

At which inhuman sally, the roistering raiders set up a foul laugh. The frightened children, in their night clothes, and the old woman, who appeared to be the grandmother, were hurried out of their home, and formed in a protecting row between the house and the timber-lined creek.

The young man with the rope about him, was now roused to complete recognition of his position, by a series of kicks and oaths. Rising to his feet, his splendid form, and commanding height, caused Chute to congratulate himself that he had him securely bound.

Several men came in from the rear, with arms full of hay, which they piled against the little rickety table, where still remained the children's cups and saucers.

"Here, Stein; set it agoin'! Clear out, men!" cried the corpulent Captain, as he took the dim little lamp from its shelf.

"Stop!" shouted the prisoner, in a voice so clear, and ringing, that it compelled attention. "There's a sick child on that bed."

The men were already filing out, but the eyes of those in the room instinctively turned to what appeared to be an empty trundle bed, in the corner, and they saw two very tiny, emaciated little hands, lying helplessly on the red quilt.

"Damn it! let it go!" yelled the Captain, seeking to smother any lurking weakness of heart, in a stream of profanity.

Stein dashed off the chimney, with the back of his hand, and tossed the flaming lamp on to the hay.

"Are you beasts, or devils?" shouted the prisoner, hurling himself against his captor. He was struck down amid cries of "Gag him!" "Stick him!" "Cut out his Yankee tongue!" And the party hurried out, dragging their

prisoner, his head bumping over the rough tussocks of prairie grass.

"Shall we string this fellow to a hickory, or drop him in the cr'ick?" asked one of the men, who found the task of dragging the prisoner too laborious.

"By G—d, no!" cried Captain Buckskin Bill, as the men began to mount. "Jerk him to his feet; a taste of rawhide will bring him to."

But neither lash, nor point of a bowie, effected a return to consciousness, and rather than leave the prisoner behind, he was flung like a sack, across Chute's horse, and lashed to the saddle horn. The horse plunged for a moment, but soon submitted to the appeal of spur and pistol butt, and the cavalcade rode forward.

There was little discipline among the men, who indulged in coarse repartee, rude bantering, and vulgar profanity, as they cantered, two abreast, along the trail, skirting the creek.

Having left a fairly safe distance between themselves and the little shanty, which was now distinguished by a feathery plume of grey-blue smoke, struck through at intervals with bright flashes of flame, they slackened speed, and, looking back, Captain Bill broke into stirrup-shaking laughter.

Being of extensive paunch, and not in good breath after the hasty gallop, the Captain's laughter was taken in a series of uneven gasps, not unlike the broken braying of a mule. Most of the men fell to imitation of their stalwart leader.

"What in h—ll do you mean?" cried the Captain, turning upon them, and hee-hawing once more, with a reflex action of the stomach he could not repress.

"That's all right, Bill!" sniffed the nearest of the party. "What are you blattering at y'rself?"

"Hee-haw!" went the Captain, in another burst of humour. "Hee-haw! Say, boys, I'll tell you, I'd give a quart of whiskey to see the faces of them Kansas 'stubs,' soon as they lay eyes on that 'pore nigger' there!"

At this, there was a general response of oaths, and expressions of hopeful anticipation that they might always have a black devil handy, to put in the way of free-soil bullets.

" 'Twas a lucky thought, by G—d, if it weren't," continued Captain Bill. "But for that, Chute, my boy, there'd be a number of women in old Missouri, claiming on your estate. Eh? Hee-haw! Eh, boys, ain't that right?"

Chute, who was proud of his gallantry, and his reputation, joined in the laugh, though he sniffed out, "I ain't so sure of that. If it had been me, struck that shanty door, I 'low it had busted in."

"Well, they've done it. They've shot a nigger. Oh, Lord, all the Scriptures won't wipe that out! Shot a nigger with their own guns!"

"Hark!" cried Mike Stein. "Thunder! If that ain't a powerful deal of yelling for a handful of Jayhawks. I 'low Brown's army's there, for sure!"

Every man in the party was a hardened ruffian, yet

such persistent, whispered rumours, of the extraordinary character of the man Brown had spread along all the border, that, for the second time, the raiders set off in much the fashion of a flight.

"Skin me!" cried the gallant Buckskin Bill, who had served under Dave Atchison, and added, to the ruffianism of his men, a strain of real daring, despite his corpulency, and shortness of breath. "You doggon'd skulkers! Why, there ain't no army of abolitionists south of Lawrence."

The Captain's purpose, at the present time, however, being to return to Missouri, he followed his retreating men.

CHAPTER II

IT was early dawn, when the party, wearied and bespattered with their long ride, reached the village of Star Cross. Once a fortified outpost, the village occupies a commanding site upon a wooded hill overlooking the Osage river.

As the horsemen came to the bank of the stream, a flame of crimson flooded the eastern horizon. The green hill stood out boldly against the morning sky, while soft draperies of foliage could be dimly discerned trailing down to the prairie behind.

Over the tops of hickory and chestnut trees, a tall cross, with a golden star carved upon its face, gleamed from the tower of the village church, and down below in the bend of the river, the still water reflected a bright image of the cross above.

The tired and hungry men now approaching, paid little heed to the beauty of the scene. The prisoner, who early in the ride had been jolted into consciousness, and thereupon showed every disposition to resent his capture, had since been driven on foot, with a halter about his neck, and a sabre point at his back.

As the little cavalcade advanced slowly down the shelving bank, to the ford, a low whistle halted them.

While they grumbled, questioning with oaths, what could delay them, so near their destination, a man in a flat punt pushed out from the bushes on the opposite side, and sculled over. As he came near, he called out;

"Have you any niggers with you, Bill?"

"No; we took a gang of twenty. Caught 'em on the Neosho, but they were county Dade coons. Turned 'em over to Boss Pate, to run 'em home."

"Well, stop your men, right here. Orders are to disband, scatter round, and come in one at a time. There's a federal officer, a United States marshal, in town, looking after raiders. He's a friend of the Colonel's and won't make no trouble, but we've got to help him out, and not give him no facts, to report on."

Buckskin Bill winked knowingly for reply, started his familiar hee-haw, and, turning to his men, cried:

"Boys, orders are to disband on the spot; scatter, and come in single. There's a government officer looking for business, and he ain't to have none, see?"

A few violent words followed these orders, for the men were hungry, but they realised the advisability of compliance, and two or three started forthwith for a lower ford, while others turned back for a temporary bivouac in the woods.

"Say, who's your prisoner?" cried the man in the punt, as Chute, at whose saddle horn the halter end was made fast, began discussing with the Captain the best disposition of the man.

"Well," Captain Bill drawled, "I dunno but what we'd

have done better to hav' left him with a load of buckshot, where we found him. But the critter's a d—d abolitionist sympathiser; that's what he is, and may be he's a spy. Or may be again, he's a Yankee supplier. Ther's something uncommon dark about him. He was mighty scared to be taken alive; made me think he had some State secrets on him, but come to search him, there wasn't a gol-darsted thing, not so much as a quid o' baccy, or a couple of red cents."

"No," put in Chute, "not a derned red cent." The prisoner meanwhile, his great chest heaving in a perfect tumult of frantic gasping, his eyes well-nigh blinded with dirt and sweat, and the fierceness of the agony endured throughout that awful drive, stained from head to foot with mud; his arms bound, his knees trembling, his clothes torn, his loose, curly hair plastered with blood, presented a wretched appearance of exhaustion and distress. He showed no signs of attention to his captors' words, but when Captain Bill spoke of finding nothing, not even any money upon him, a faint light, as of a remembered satisfaction, played for a moment on his face.

"He's a sorry looking critter enough," muttered the man in the boat.

"Guess I'll march him over and stow him in the block house; the marshal ain't likely to be around yet a bit I 'low?"

"Reckon not," responded the other, pushing off again in the punt.

The Captain, with Chute and the prisoner, splashed across the shallow ford. They ascended a winding lane fenced with substantial stake and riders, and entered, under the big overhanging limbs of an avenue of chestnut trees, the principal street of the village. Doors and windows were being thrown open, clean-faced women were sweeping the porches. The rosy light was brightening into brilliant gold, smoke from the cottages curled up and became amber above the tree tops. The block house was in the oldest part of the settlement near the church on the hill, and Buckskin Bill, who was in advance, turned from the corner of the village square, by a roundabout way to the back of the church.

As it happened, the government deputy marshal came out from the rear of the hotel at the very moment the three men were passing. The marshal was looking over a possible purchase in the matter of a saddle horse, and the animal was held by a smart-looking slave boy. Captain Bill was hurrying when he turned into this narrow road, but the horse across the middle of the way compelled him to pull in and turn to one side. The marshal, a military-looking man of energetic bearing, with peaked beard, and flaming nose, immediately called out:

"Here, my man! Hold on there! Nay, stand, sir; you have the honour to be in the presence of a United States marshal. So! You are just the man I'm looking for. Returning from a raid, eh?"

The corpulent Captain was a man of a good deal of native resource, though for the space of a full breath he

felt cornered, yet before the words of the marshal were well spoken, his wit supplied him with a daring answer.

"If you was the President of the United States himself, I'd not be more gol-derned glad to see you, Colonel. I'm a deputy marshal myself, but not a Federal. My papers are from the Sovereign State of Virginny. And let me tell you, Colonel, I'm glad to see ye. I've made an arrest here that I want to tell you is going to be talked about in Washington. This devilish-looking gentleman you see here, sir, has been wanted in Richmond, Virginny, for more'n a year, on three separate counts—forgery, robbery, and murder! It's the best day's work I've done for many a while."

The Captain nodded to Chute to move his man on; while leaning towards the marshal he offered to come back, after safely bestowing the prisoner, and give him a glowing account of the fine fight he had to get his man. Chute, taking his cue, started forward, when the prisoner, facing quickly towards the marshal, said in a voice quivering with emotion, and harsh with long agony:

"Sir, as you are an American, and a gentleman, I beg of you to save me. These men are raiders and cut-throats. What he has said—"

Before the sentence was complete, the halter choked him, and he fell back against Chute's horse. In a moment Chute had him by the neck, and was forcing him quickly up the street.

Captain Bill made an attempt with his peculiar hee-haw to laugh off the event.

"Gosh, Colonel, you'd better believe I shall be glad to get that ripping galoot back to Virginny."

But the red-nosed marshal, taking a cautious look up and down the street, whispered harshly:

"You must be a blamed fool to put yourself in my way; it's lucky for you there was no one on the street. Get your eyes open; there have to be some arrests made to satisfy the government's enemies that these raids are being stopped, and I'm down here to make them. You great prairie porpoise you, don't you know me?"

The Captain's small eyes took on a look of genuine astonishment, as with a vehement oath he cried:

"It ain't! Well, blind my eyes, Colonel Jeff!"

"Go on, Captain, you mustn't be seen about, till this U. S. marshal has completed his investigations and returned whence he came. That'll be for twenty-four hours or so."

"True for you, Colonel." And the Captain, grinning and chuckling, rode after Chute to allay any apprehensions that worthy lieutenant might be harbouring, and to see that the prisoner was carefully secured from holding further communications with any inhabitants of the village.

CHAPTER III

COLONEL JEFFERSON MENDENHALL, who had temporarily assumed the disguise, and red nose, of a bogus United States marshal, had been in Star Cross since the previous summer. He was not a native Missourian, but a Virginian, detailed on special secret service, in the interest of the pro-slavery party, to aid in the effort to maintain the neighbouring territory of Kansas as an ally of the slave power. His dash and daring, combined with great resourcefulness, caused him to be recognised as a leader in the border warfare, already being vigourously waged from Westport to Fort Smith. He was in constant communication, on the one hand with Governor Shannon, Major Richardson, Dr. Tom Johnson, and other leaders in the neighbouring territory, and on the other with representatives of the Federal Government in Washington, who, under President Franklin Pierce, were favourable to the institutions of the South. The necessity for some statistics to satisfy the Washington officials induced the Colonel to pose for a time as the national government's representative. This insured that nothing disadvantageous to the cause should be reported. Having sufficiently shown himself to warrant the fact that such a representative had

actually visited Star Cross, the Colonel resumed his own uniform, and a little later in the day, accompanied Captain Bill to ascertain what information could be obtained from the prisoner whom the raiders brought in from Kansas.

While Colonel Mendenhall was thus occupied, Barbara Fairfax, the daughter of the rector, admitted by her father's patient listeners to be the solace of many eyes through the tedium of church-going, happened to be engaged in one of her frequent disputes with her brother Phil.

They were in the big garden behind the rectory, and Phil was persistently endeavouring to induce his sister to join him in dramatic recitations from the Greek and Trojan heroes.

"Come, Phil, be a good boy," Barbara pleaded, "and let me finish this book. Then I'll tell you a story, or something, but I don't want to play your horrid old Trojan war game, not even for the sake of being Minerva; it's too fatiguing, and I never can remember the monstrous long speeches."

"There you go! That's the way you treat me all the time. You big, pampered, selfish thing you!"

"For shame, Phil, for shame! Showing your temper like that!"

"Who's showing temper, I'd like to know? Look at me, with all my suffering! How'd you like to be a little cripple, three feet high, with a lump in the middle of your back, eh? Wouldn't you want some one to amuse

you once in a while, and not have a great lazy sister reading love stories from morning till night? Yes, they are, too! I know."

"Look here, Phil, if I send for Sambo and Pete, will you be quiet?"

"No, I won't. I don't want to play with nigger slaves; they're stupider than dogs. They can't think of anything I want. All they can do is to holler and grin! All the blessed time, holler and grin, the idiots!"

"Well, I'll get the Moses boy."

"No you won't. You'll just play with me yourself, or else I'll tell Colonel Mendenhall I saw you kissing his picture last night. You did! I saw you!"

Barbara shut her book with a slap, and springing from her chair, stood over her small crippled brother, with an angry colour flaming over her cheeks.

"Bab! Bab!" the little fellow cried, clasping his thin fingers in sudden delight. "I'll forgive you everything, if you'll play like that! You must be Minerva. Think of anyone refusing to be Minerva, who can look the part like that."

At this moment, a small coloured boy sidled into view, emerging from a bed of laurel bushes.

Philip, seeing him, called out:

"Say, Toffy, I thought you were in the woods. Come here quick!"

The boy rolled his black eyes, and shook his head mysteriously, as he shuffled over to Phil, while Barbara

settled back into the cushioned rocking chair, and continued her novel.

"Marse Phil, dere be mighty days comin', an' you an' me'll be driven in de howlin' blast; you, Marse Phil, one way, an' Toffy Moses 'nother!"

Phil burst into screaming laughter, but presently straightening himself, he cried out in his sharp voice: "You tuft head you; haven't I told you to keep out of nigger politics? Don't you know you'll get put down the river if some folks hear you? You keep to your coon songs, d'you hear! I know what I'm telling you. If you don't you'll get worse than a whipping."

"Marse Phil, you'se got the eyes of the crag eagle; you see into what everybody's thinking. I'se in wonder and 'mazement at you perpet'ully, but, oh, Marse Phil, dere's one thing you'ns never know. De voice dat has no tongue, de cry dat has no sound, down, down dere in de heart ob de pore slave!"

The boy's eyes stopped rolling; he raised his head from its common humble carriage, and looked to heaven.

"Dere's a song in de night, Marse Phil; it's de chipping of de little birds for sure of de morning. Dey knows, dey knows! De mighty Lord o' Heaven, he gives 'em word."

"Where've you been? You're crazy witted," cried Phil.

"No, I ain't," responded Toffy, whose great eyes were filled with excitement. "But I'se seen a terrible powerful sight this morñin'. Oh, I'se seen a terrible powerful sight."

"Where?" cried Phil, catching something of the slave boy's evident interest.

"Back of Job's alley. Oh, it means troublous times, Marse Phil. It do; it means troublous times. There wer' Buckskin Billy and a man named Chute; they was home from a nigger hunt. They was takin', de Lord bless him, de Lord glorify his martyrs, dey was takin' a white man who'd fought for de pore slave; dey was takin' him to de block house; dey'll flog him dere for de pore slave's sake; flog him for de pore slave's sake. De Lord shield him; de Lord bless him in his soul!"

"Bab, do you hear that?" cried Philip. "Why it's just like war already, only father says there never will be war, because the North could never get up pluck enough for that, but they'll soon see the South can fight. Think of it, we've got a prisoner, here at Star Cross. Is not that splendid?"

"Don't speak like that, Philip; why in the world don't they keep the silly slaves on their plantations, instead of letting them run off, and then have to be hunted back again?"

"But this isn't any nigger, Bab; this is a white Yankee, one of these Kansas spies, sneaking down South and stirring up rebellion, teaching our slaves to murder us. I hope he'll be hanged!"

"Fie, Philip! Your Greek heroes make you ferocious."

"Marse Philip, he dun neber know de great sorrow eatin' up de hearts ob de pore slaves."

"Say, Babbie; oh, say! I've an idea. Let's go and see him."

"See him?"

"The spy."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know, Toffy says they were taking him to the block house. There's a way out of our garden into the palisades; we can look through the bars and see him."

"I'll go," cried Barbara. "But do you think he'll shoot us if he sees us?"

"Oh, they'd take his guns from him before they shut him up. Come, Toffy, catch hold of my chair."

The three were soon at the end of the rectory grounds, and there Philip had to leave his chair, and take to his little black crutches. With wonderful dexterity he swung himself along under the laurel bushes, where Barbara was almost compelled to creep.

"I never came through here before," she cried. "How did you know of it, Phil?"

"Oh, trust to me for knowing things. Look here."

They came out against the high palisades, surrounding the old block house, built some fifty years before, for possible safety from Indian attacks, when Star Cross was a Louisiana outpost. "Isn't this a contrivance! I found it out one day when I was hiding from old Dad!"

On one of the posts of the palisades were strips of plaited leather, concealing a wooden catch, by which a piece of the framed uprights could be opened, swinging back on well hidden hinges. This made a small entrance,

sufficiently high and wide to admit the passage of a man stooping.

"This is a regular adventure," whispered Barbara; "but I'm getting frightened, now we're so near."

"Yes, we'd better not make a noise," Philip admitted.

"But the question is, what are we going to do to get up there now?"

"Up where?"

"Why, don't you see the only way to look in, is up at that narrow grating; there's a long slit across the bottom to put your hands in and then a lot of upright ones to see through. I'll tell you what. Can you reach up there? Try it. If you can, you can make sure he's there, and then we can fix a bench or something to stand on. But I don't half believe they'd put anyone in there. I guess we'll find it's empty after all."

Barbara approached the wall cautiously.

"There's someone in there," she declared in a stage whisper. "I can hear a voice. Oh, I'm frightened; I don't believe I dare try."

"Go on, Barbara; go on now, this is great!" cried Phil, waving one of his crutches, in excitement. "It's all safe, I tell you; he won't have a gun."

Thus encouraged, Barbara turned again to the high wall of the block house; the narrow openings were not more than the height of a man's head from the ground, and by rising on tiptoe, steadying herself with her hands on the lower bar, Barbara peered within.

For a moment Phil and Theophilus were consumed with suspense.

Then Barbara stepped quickly back, her face alive with colour, a look of wondering astonishment in her dark eyes.

"Hush! Don't say a word! Come away!" she urged, and hurried the boys out of the enclosure.

"Was he there? Was he there? Tell me that, Bab!" Phil demanded.

"Yes, yes, but Colonel Mendenhall was there, too!"

"Did he see you? Oh, Lord, if he saw you, he'll spot our secret way."

"He didn't see me, but the prisoner did, and oh * * he looked so."

"Golly, if he scared you like that, he must be a bad 'un."

"I wish we hadn't gone. Did you hear what he said?"

"No; was he preaching?"

"The Colonel was threatening him."

"I bet Colonel Jeff can make him squeal."

"Oh, I wish I had not seen him," Barbara declared. "I wish I had not seen him."

CHAPTER IV

BARBARA'S usual tranquillity was greatly disturbed by this visit to the block house. She could not forget it. The prisoner's face, strong, youthful, yet so pitifully bruised, haunted her.

For the first time in her experience, she discovered an interest in actual life, greater than the fascination of poetry or romance. Thus she was in a dreamy reverie, gazing upon the open book upon her knee, but not reading it, when she was roused by the sonorous voice of her father calling "Barbara! Barbara!" in the familiar imperious tones, with which the pompous rector invariably seasoned his domestic commands. As her father repeated her name, with a roar of emphasis, Barbara started from her reverie, and answered from the cosy corner where she was ensconced, "I'm too sleepy to play cribbage tonight, father."

"Cribbage! cribbage! I said, what year was Missouri made a State?"

The rector of Star Cross Memorial Church, having dined, and dined well, was physically extremely comfortable, so much so, that he desired every mental gratification supplied with equal ease. His placid, genial wife sat meekly by, but, in the present instance, had unfor-

tunately been unequal to the task of filling the sudden hiatus in the memory of her loud-voiced spouse. This delay caused the good rector to show very definite symptoms of violent anger; his broad, clean-shaven face, was quickly suffused with florid tints, varying from brilliant crimson to deep purple in the heavier folds. Seeing which, Mrs. Fairfax added her sweet, bird-like call to the roar of her husband, saying:

"Barbara, my dear, your father wishes to know in what year Missouri was admitted to the Union?"

"I'm not really awake enough to think," Barbara responded lazily.

"Confound the girl! Did you ever hear such impudence! For what have I paid your tutors? For what have Dudeney and Doone's, at Richmond, been sending twenty-five volumes of histories, biographies, and classics, every quarter? If you haven't had teaching and books enough to know your dates, Miss?"

"I've often told you, father, that tutors were a reckless extravagance. They invariably imbibe more than they impart. At least that is my experience. And as to the booksellers! Why, your orders were so strict, that the books I really wanted I have always been obliged to obtain on the sly."

"What! What! On the sly? You dare to say—"

"Well, what am I to do? Every novel I have been able to smuggle into the house I have read."

"Mrs. Fairfax!" shouted the rector, bringing his plump

hand smartly upon his knee. "Mrs. Fairfax, do you hear that?"

"Now, father, be reasonable," Miss Barbara continued. There's a book I want now, very much; all the world is reading it."

"Mrs. Fairfax! Will you sit there, and listen to the defiance of your only daughter? Is this what we are coming to, in our old age?"

"Robert! Robert! pray do not say old age! Why, why, the girl is but a child yet. It's her smartness makes you fancy she's older."

"Do you defend her, then? Gad! I tell you, Miss, if I were not so confoundedly comfortable, I'd come over to you, and I'd—"

"You would, father? You would? I dare you to try it." And Barbara, with a saucy laugh, appeared from her cosy corner, and advanced upon the fortress of the easy chair.

"Now, father, I'll offer you terms. I'll tell you your old date, if you will send for my book."

Before the emphatic ejaculations, which were ready to spring to the rector's lips, were uttered, his aggressive daughter, sure of her conquest, darted upon her prey, locking her soft arms about his neck, and declaring that he was the very best of old daddies, and she would inform him at once, that the noble State of Missouri, formed into a territory at the time of the war with England, became a State in 1821.

"There, Robert, there!" cried Mrs. Fairfax, proud of her clever daughter's capacity.

"It was a little dandified tutor from Baltimore taught me that!" Barbara said. "I called him the Baltimore oriole; he dressed so. He had a rigmarole of stuff to remember dates by. The great I AM was Illinois, Alabama, and Maine, and they were admitted 1818, 1819, 1820. Missouri followed the great I AM the next year, 1821. Now, father, don't forget to order my book by the very first mail."

The good rector laughed indulgently. "You've got some fighting blood in you, Miss Babbie Bantum, haven't you? And so have I, my lass; so have I. Well, well, I'll surrender, as the terms are honourable. Now get back to your entrenchments and let me read my paper."

Barbara moved away, turning however to say:

"If you'll tell me how to address to Dudeney's Dad, I'll write the order now, for I'm just consumed with curiosity to see the book."

"Why, child," put in her mother, "what can it be that is so tempting?"

"Gad, you didn't tell me the name of it. I'm curious to know, too. If it's that fox-hunting English vicar's book, which I see is just being spoken of, 'Westward Ho,' I've a d—d good mind to read it myself."

"Why, Robert!"

"Well, evil communications corrupt good manners, and when I found Philip the other day, devouring one of Miss Babbie's stolen treasures, I took it away from him

and read it myself. I didn't enjoy it, of course, it smelt of depravity. Still Kingsley, you see, is a man of the cloth."

"I doubt if that is the book Barbara wants; is it, my dear?"

"Why, if father wants me to get it—for him—of course I should consent to read it. But that is not the particular book I want."

"No, I feared not," rejoined Mrs. Fairfax. "A novel of any sort is bad enough, but I have had my doubts, Barbara, that you had really been reading some—some society novels!"

"Oh, mamma!"

"Come, I'll make my guess," cried Mrs. Fairfax, emboldened by Barbara's mock timidity. "It is this 'Cranford,' by a Mrs. Gaskell! They do say it is all gossip!"

"Well!" cried Barbara, "you and father seem to have the new novels at your finger ends! All the better. Let me order the three!"

Barbara went eagerly to an open desk, but Mrs. Fairfax, with wise motherly thoughtfulness, said:

"But, my dear, you have not told us yet, the name of the book you so particularly want."

"Oh, mine, mamma, is not an imported article; it is by an American. And it isn't a society novel, I'm sure. It's a book Aunt Abbie told me of, called 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"

"What?" cried her father, slapping down his paper, and actually jumping out of his chair with astonishment.

"That book! Why, it's the most pestiferous falsehood that ever was hatched! It's sedition and treason. That book in my house! You might as well order the Boston 'Liberator' at once!"

At this moment, Colonel Jefferson Mendenhall, bowing with the greatest precision to the ladies, entered the room, before Sambo could announce his arrival.

"The 'Liberator,' Dr. Fairfax! I understand the editor is about to receive a highly complimentary appointment from Pierce, and be sent to Tokyo, to be our 'Garrison' there."

"A good joke, Colonel," laughed the rector. "I saw it in the St. Louis Globe yesterday."

"I made a note of it for your especial benefit, Doctor. But doubtless you can depend upon brighter eyes than mine to report to you."

Colonel Mendenhall bowed again to Barbara

"Brighter eyes, Colonel!" ejaculated the rector, taking up the interrupted topic. "Would you believe them capable of feeding themselves upon the abominable literature of the abolitionists?"

"Heaven defend them from such poison!" fervently exclaimed the Colonel, but there was a ring of pleasant jocularity in his voice, which, without disturbing the meaning of his words in the ears of the rector, yet soothed the implication to the daughter.

"Ah!" continued the Colonel, "now I am enlightened; this is why I find you with the name of the hated Boston

newspaper upon your lips. Miss Barbara has received a copy from her aunt in Massachusetts, and—"

"No such thing, sir; no sister of mine, sir, would have the effrontery to do so unsisterly an act."

"But they say Miss Fairfax of Boston is an ardent sympathiser."

"Sympathiser she may be, but she still values my feelings in the matter. No, Colonel! Be seated, be seated! My indignation previous to your arrival was due to the request of Miss Bab here, that she might send for a copy of that worst of all abolitionist attacks, which by the way they say is being secretly circulated among our own slaves, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' "

Colonel Mendenhall, at the invitation of his host, approached Barbara with a playfully severe look, and as she laughingly took her seat at the writing desk, he murmured, "This is very serious," and ensconced himself in a chair by her side.

"I am inclined to think, Doctor, that it will not be necessary to waste our indignation much longer over the extremists in the North, whatever the perfidiousness of their methods. They are in a decided minority as it is, and at the rate we are progressing in Kansas, I make no doubt that we shall soon be admitted to the Union. The thirty-second State—that will put Pierce and the South where we shall be safe."

"That's it, that's what should be done. But, gad, I have my doubts that the South won't arouse herself in time. They're asleep down the river. Why, bless my

soul, Colonel, ten thousand squatters could be put in Kansas in six weeks, and they tell me we are not strong enough there to carry another legislature, though we have been at it since '54!"

"You're right, Doctor; it is my opinion as it is yours, that we are now swimming on the very turn of the tide; the whole South ought to be aroused to it. If we lose Kansas, it means immediate encroachments upon our rights. But, as I say, everything is looking the other way. To tell you the truth, if I may talk secrets in the confidence of this house, I have advices from Donaldson and Stringfellow only an hour ago, notifying me of the completion of our plans for a concentration on Lawrence. I cannot, of course, reveal the full nature of the movement. But it means that such steps are now on foot as will secure the positive enforcement of the Topeka laws. The free soilers must yield or quit. Plenty of them are scuttling out of the State already; it is getting too warm for them. If it were not for a few insatiable abolition Yankees who forced themselves onto the free State party, like Lane and Robinson, the thing would be already settled."

"Colonel, your news is cheering. Do you go with the expedition?"

"I must. Such importance hangs upon the result, that it is essential, and indeed I came to make my farewells."

Barbara, who during the preceding conversation quietly dangled a palmetto over the silky ears of one of

the dozing hounds, now looked up quickly into the Colonel's watchful eyes and then with a pretty blush turned to the hound again, saying:

"I had no idea you expected to go away so soon."

The Colonel's expressive eyes spoke a world of explanations, but Barbara declined to meet his gaze, and only heard his polite reply:

"Nothing could be less to my liking than that which takes me away from Star Cross." Adding in lower tones, while stooping to the hound beneath Barbara's hand, "When I come back—"

"A concentration on Lawrence, you say?" interposed Dr. Fairfax. "That is sound sense. There is the hotbed of antagonism to Shannon. There is the centre of the fraudulent Emigration Aid Society. Stamp out Lawrence, and you destroy the vital nerve of abolition in the whole State of Kansas. What strength do you expect to muster, Colonel?"

"That is doubtful. I have given up depending upon Stringfellow's boasted numbers, and Titus' cohorts are unknown quantities. One thing, however, is sure; Buford, of the first Virginians, is an old chum of mine, and I have his assurance that he will meet me on the Wakarusa by the twentieth of the month."

"If I know anything of the Yankees, Colonel, it will be no fight. When our boys appear in force, the white flag will meet them, carried by the best citizens of Lawrence."

"There are some determined men there, Doctor, and we

are told they have a thousand Sharpe's rifles, a deadly new invention, and a couple of cannon, smuggled in as mowing machines. What they lack is a leader. There is a man who has a camp on the Ossawatomie, a regular Puritan fighter, an extraordinary character. Keeps his camp in perfect military precision. Lives on mush and bacon! Neither swears, drinks nor smokes! In size he is a giant, lean and gaunt, but of marvellous endurance. He has six sons, all copies of the old man, and all sworn by secret oaths to eternal hatred of slavery."

"Oh, that's Brown, old John Brown. I've heard of some of his desperate doings. He has been across the border here several times, quoting Scripture while he stole niggers. He's the military agent of the 'Underground Railway.' They say he has a colony of hundreds of slave families up in Canada."

"That's the same man, Doctor. He's the only born fighter in Kansas, on the abolitionist side. Already his very name puts our border parties to flight. The men who came in last night brought a whole batch of rumours about him. They also took a prisoner; caught him in a noted Free-soil rendezvous. We have him safe in the old block house now. At first I thought it was one of Brown's sons; he has that stiff necked grit, but he has been too well fed; he's altogether too soft for one of their tribe."

"Oh, what do you think he is?" interrupted Barbara, suddenly taking interest in the Colonel's news. "Do you believe he's a spy?"

Before the Colonel could respond to Barbara's eager inquiry, the door was thrown violently open, and Theophilus Moses rushed in and with a bursting sob, flung himself at the Rector's feet.

CHAPTER V

MARSE FAIRFAX! Oh, Marse Fairfax! Dey is whippin' Mammy Mine; dey is surely whippin' her to de death!"

Having flung himself full length upon the floor, Toffy Moses clasped, with his trembling fingers, the Rector's soft slippers.

The hounds knew the boy too well to hurt him, but they leaped up and down over his wriggling form, and added their resonant barking to his agonised cries.

"What do you say, boy?" cried the Rector. "Your old mammy being whipped? Come, come, that can't be."

Barbara, in the meantime, beat back the hounds and made Toffy sit up.

Between gasps, sobs, and sudden cries that someone should go quick and save "Mammy Mine" before she was all dead, Toffy made them understand that mammy was under the lash, by the order of Captain Buckskin Bill, the Captain being agent for the owners of the Moses family.

"He's very likely drunk," interposed Colonel Mendenhall. "He's a good fighter, and has command of the St. Clair Rangers, but he's a bull calf for stupidity, and a full blooded Mexican for cruelty. Come, jump up here, boy," he added with some irritation. "Quit your bellow-

ing, and get out and unhitch my horse." Toffy sprang quickly to his feet, and as Barbara rose the Colonel said with a very different accent, "This may have something to do with our prisoner; we've been trying to get information from him as to the whereabouts and strength of Brown's forces, with which we think he was connected, and this woman took the prisoner his meals. She has been telling in the village that he is the friend of the slave, and we think she knows more that she won't reveal. But I will satisfy myself, and may I then return? I must leave Star Cross at dawn tomorrow!"

"Yes, yes, certainly come back," Barbara cried impatiently. "But do go quickly now; we are too fond of 'Mammy Mine' to want to have her whipped. It makes me feel horribly to think of it."

The members of the Moses family were regarded with quite a kindly interest by most of the residents of Star Cross. They were owned by an estate, the local Sheriff, Buckskin Bill, acting as agent for the absentee executors. Old man Moses was a barber, and his corner room was well patronized. His wisdom and wit were valuable factors in enlivening the lounging hours, which, in a Missouri town, are not the least important part of life to the majority of the inhabitants. He was skilful also in his care of fruit trees, and through his labours gave such good returns to the executors that they kept him there. Neither he, nor any members of his family, were manumitted. Buckskin Bill, as agent for the executors, received the earnings of the family, but the sense of

semi-independence which this arrangement imparted doubtless had something to do with a tendency on the part of old Moses to develop dangerous political ideas, which, had he not been an old man and regarded as a harmless theorist, would long ago have brought him severe punishment. His wife was a woman of fine intelligence and native shrewdness. She was not very black, and in her youth had been strikingly handsome, but the barbarities and cruelty of the life in Tennessee stamped upon her face the ineffaceable lines of suffering, and wrote agony and revulsion where once were hope and promise. Her cries under the heavy lash, administered by Buckskin Bill, ceased before Colonel Mendenhall's horse clattered up to the barber's shop. As the Colonel entered he found Bill, Chute, and Stein in a violent altercation in the middle of the room, while old Moses and "Mammy Mine" were huddled together, crouching in a corner. A couple of children's black faces, with rolling eyes, peered out of the big chimney, whither they had fled for safety.

With impatient severity, Mendenhall demanded instant cessation of the squabbling discussion of his subordinates, and an immediate explanation of the necessity for the punishment of the woman. The men knew how to obey the Virginian officer, and though their bearing and even their language often appeared insolent, yet they invariably followed his orders, his superior knowledge and will power, to say nothing of his reputation as a swordsman and pistol shot, and the commanding magnetism of his

voice and presence, always compelling their recognition.

"Have you fools nothing more to do, on the eve of the best chance you ever had in your lives, than to bluster and brawl over a nigger woman? I'll stake a double eagle our men are not yet half equipped. Don't you understand we start at daylight?"

"Gol dern it, Colonel Jeff," replied Bill, assuming a rough air of indifference, "I'll take my leave of the whole business before I'll start out along of a —— traitor and a —— liar in our own troop."

At this, Chute, swearing fearfully, drew his knife and made as though he would rush upon Bill. Stein, however, held him back. Mendenhall stepped between them, drawing his sword, and declaring he would run through the first man who attempted to carry the quarrel any further. At this Buckskin Bill, restraining the violence of his tone and language, undertook to explain the situation.

It seemed that the eldest son of the Moses family, a burly looking young darkey of eighteen or nineteen years of age, was pressed into the service by Captain Bill and taken by him on the late raid into Kansas. He had not returned. To satisfy "mammy" Moses, Bill told her the boy bolted when they were in the territory, and was now a free nigger with some of the cursed abolitionists of Kansas. By some unexplainable intuition, however, the mother did not accept the statement with any confidence, and upon questioning the prisoner at the block house she had discovered the truth that her boy, used as a decoy,

was shot by the free soilers and left dead upon the road. In her fury the woman flew upon Captain Bill, as a reckless mother bird at the despoiler of her nest, whereupon he had judiciously knocked her down, and upon further consideration administered a cowhide whipping, both as a preventive of further insolence and for the purpose of discovering what other information the block house prisoner had imparted. After a few ineffectual cries for mercy, Mother Moses soon confessed that the prisoner told her he was on his way to join Captain John Brown when he was taken, but that he had been robbed, while unconscious, and money and letters taken from him. This was the cause of the present dispute. No one but Chute had handled the prisoner, and Bill charged him with possession of the money.

Chute, who had listened to the account given to Captain Mendenhall, with changing colour, now burst forth again with angry disclaimers of any knowledge of the business. But Mendenhall cut short the affair by declaring:

"Boys! Look here! I want fighters. We've got a big campaign on our hands. We don't know but the whole North is going to rise against us on this Kansas issue. A decisive blow struck now may give us control of the Union; every side issue can take care of itself. Bill, you were in charge of the foray, and Chute here took this prisoner. If he had any spoils, settle the division of it between you when you get back."

Chute, however, continued to deny having obtained

anything. And Mendenhall decided to try a little physical punishment upon the prisoner himself, and thus endeavour to force from him a statement of the disposition or strength of the enemy. Chute was sent out forthwith to round up the men, who were to start in the morning, while Captain Bill and Stein were to meet Colonel Mendenhall at the block house.

No sooner was the Moses house left to its proper occupants again than mammy broke forth into prolonged wailing. The conflict of emotions produced such a tumult in her breast that nothing but the wildest cries seemed any solace to her. At one moment passionate grief, as she thought of her lost boy, lowered her wailing into heart-broken sobs, till a surge of impotent rage against the vile men who led him to his slaughter lifted her voice again into shrill, quivering screeches. Then as she realised how, under the agony of the lash, she had betrayed the young Northerner, the friend of her race, in prison up there on the hill, she wailed in sorrow that was mingled grief and repentance.

Old man Moses, who, with all his sage wit and natural mental philosophy, had no more courage than was to be expected of a long ill-used, much beaten slave, found some difficulty in controlling his own fears sufficiently to afford mammy any consoling advice. But presently, tracing with slow finger up and down the extraordinary profusion of narrow wrinkles which lay netted over his temples and brow, plaited like wisps from the broom corn, he murmured in droning, yet not unmusical voice:

"Who's hung up de noticeboard? 'No way here!' Who's hung it up dar? De Almighty's gwine to knock dat post down, honey, sure's you born. Der's a bottle ob de Lord's wrath in some white man's pocket, who's gwine to be President ob these United States some good day 'fore long, honey. Yes, dar is!"

But mammy suddenly sprang to her feet.

"Get you'se out from that chimbley, here you, Saphronia. Get you'se out! And run with dis here paper after the Colonel."

At that moment, however, Theophilus, who, after bringing Colonel Mendenhall to the rescue of his mother, had remained outside in the security of the night, appeared in the doorway. To him Mammy Moses turned, taking a crumpled paper from the toe of an old slipper behind the door.

"Run, now, catch up with Marse Capt'n Mendenhall 'n giv' dis paper into his own han'. Tell him dey was picked up in Marse Stein's house by you mammy, P'raps dey save dat whippin' from de friend ob de pore slave!"

Theophilus, who had not been so far hidden as to miss hearing a word of what had already passed, understood at once, and darted off swiftly. He came in sight of the three men and saw the Colonel turn towards the parsonage, leaving Captain Bill and Mike Stein to go on to the block house, and he heard the Colonel tell them to saunter along and he would join them in a few minutes; then he spurred his horse and disappeared. At first Theophilus,

seeing he could not overtake the Colonel, thought he would wait for him along the road, but on further meditation he determined to follow to the parsonage.

Theophilus being a poet as well as a slave, had vast personal possessions in the world of sentiment and imagination; he lived in many shapes, enjoyed, triumphed, suffered a thousand and one strange experiences entirely foreign to his own. The shape he treasured most, reserving for assumption only in his happiest moments, was that of a handsome Prince, outwardly as unlike his own dusky self as imagination could devise. It was the little black poet's pleasure to make this wonderful Prince the lover of the greatest lady, the most beautiful, and the most adorable in all the world, and that lady was, of course, Philip's sister, Miss Barbara Fairfax. Two strange things happened tonight as he stood for a moment doubtful in the road; he suddenly became conscious of assuming the character of his favourite and at the same moment he had a realising conviction that his Prince bore a remarkable likeness to the "friend ob de pore slave" imprisoned in the block house. Theophilus was mortally superstitious, and he ran immediately to a point where he could catch sight in the clear moonlight of the great cross with its central star gleaming from the church tower. He supposed a swan maiden must have come down the river from the Marais des Signes to question her knight at the bend of the river, whereupon her more than earthly lover, seeing above him the sign of the cross, ascended to the stars. Theophilus had long desired to

see an exemplification of this wonderful legend, and in his excitement he very nearly forgot the Colonel and his message. Ascending the hill, however, he detoured round the parsonage for a better view of the church tower, and in doing so, while observing no sign of a disembodied knight addressing himself in obeisance to the great cross, he was aware of the opening of a side door in the parsonage and of two figures coming out into the garden. He went forward to the rustic gate which opened into the old parsonage garden on that side, and, passing in, approached the couple, who, unconscious of his presence and having closed the door behind them, were apparently engaged in a fond farewell. Theophilus advanced, considerately sniffing and scuffling his shoes on the gravel.

Colonel Mendenhall found it difficult to repress the words of very natural indignation which the boy's untimely interruption brought to his lips. Barbara, however, laughingly cried:

"Well, now, you really must go, Colonel!"

But when Theophilus had presented his piece of crumpled paper, Barbara begged the Colonel to step once more to the door, that they might in the light of the hall lamp discover the "miserable traitor's wicked schemes."

"It is a letter, written, I imagine, to our prisoner," the Colonel said, as he smoothed out and examined the paper. "Yes, from the Kansas ruffian; there we have his autograph, as stiff and stubborn looking as himself, 'John Brown!' I fear his language will hardly be fit for polite

ears. Let us hope there may be some revelation of his plans." The letter was as follows:

To Mr. Oliver Wentworth.

My Dear Friend: I shall be very glad if you join our cause. But I would flatter no man into such a measure, if I could do it ever so easily. I expect nothing but to endure hardness, but I expect to effect a mighty conquest, even though it be like the last victory of Samson. I felt, for a number of years in earlier life, a strong desire to die, but since I saw any prospect of becoming a reaper in the great harvest, I am rather anxious to live for a few years more. Nothing less than a holy passion can purge from the world its most deadly sin, and for my own part the cry of those "who have no helper" and the sight of those "whose tears are ever in their eyes," move me to a constant desire to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, "and so to give my whole heart to the cause of God's oppressed." As I have said, join us by all means, if you are convinced of the justice of the endeavour to restore three million of God's children from the inhumanity of their chains, to the natural freedom of all his humble poor. Only remember this, the good we can do will not come easily; it must be "bought with a price." Whichever way you decide, may God, for Christ's sake, bless you always.

Your friend,

John Brown.

Colonel Mendenhall crumpled up the letter with an exclamation of disappointment.

"Pious, canting old hypocrite! I've no doubt he's shipping rifles and labelling them hymn books. However, our friend in the block house was evidently on his way to the lion's lair. I must wring from him the facts. Then for Kansas and the triumph of the South. A brief adieu, till I return victorious," and the Colonel hastened to his appointment with his subordinates.

CHAPTER VI

BEFORE daybreak on the following morning most of the men who took part in the last Kansas raid were in the saddle. There was clattering, jingling, shouting and swearing as they gathered towards the rendezvous across the ford. The frequency of these audacious raids into the territory, the sanction actually extended to them by persons in the highest official capacities, and the leadership of such men as Mendenhall, furloughed by the Virginian Governor for the purpose, led to the careless abandonment of all secrecy. The present territorial Legislature of Kansas, known as the bogus Legislature, was elected the previous November by an organised movement throughout all the western counties of Missouri. Companies of men were sent out into every representative voting district in the territory, distributed in such a way as to control the election. They went to vote, and by the free use of oaths and pistols they did vote. More than five thousand Missourians thus forcibly took possession of the government of Kansas. Governor Reeder was dismissed, and the President of the United States, Franklin Pierce, complied with a promise to do all in his power towards making Kansas a slave State by appointing as governor

a man pledged to pro-slavery views, Wilson Shannon. With the assured support of both federal President and territorial Governor, and with a Legislature of their own electing, it is not to be wondered at that the Missourians cared little for cloaking their illegal acts with secrecy.

Men, innocent of any offence, were shot for simply holding Free State views. It was openly proclaimed that eastern settlers, who were not willing to support southern rights, must choose Nebraska, and not Kansas, for their destination, otherwise they would be driven back or summarily disposed of.

As the present raiders gathered together there was, therefore, little concealment of the purpose of their expedition.

"Men!" cried Mendenhall, standing erect in his stirrups and motioning for silence, "you all understand what we are here for! Most of you have already served in the cause of the solid South, but today you are starting in on the biggest chance you ever had to fight for the glory of Southern privileges. So far we have held a triumphant position across the border. The abolitionists have been whipped out of every office in the territory; they have been whipped out of their own legislature. And you Missourians have done it! You've done it so well that the Yankees up in New England have got mad. Mad and scared. And now they are pouring in hired assassins, instructed to defy our laws and seize the territory. They are setting up a Free State press and a fraudulent government at Lawrence, and our job is to stop them, to hang

the ringleaders, smash the press, and wipe out the mutiny."

The men cheered these sentiments loudly and evinced their readiness to do the business this time, and rest neither hand nor foot till the whole territory was cleared of the abolition vermin.

A blood red flag, with a lone star in the centre, was unfurled and the cavalcade moved off, followed by a train of supply wagons. It was the most formidable raiding party which had as yet been organised. Half a dozen similar companies, forming in other counties, were to meet in Independence, and thence, under the lead of J. B. Donaldson, U. S. Marshal of Kansas Territory, proceed to Lawrence. It was well known what force was likely to be encountered in the neighbourhood of Lawrence, and the men under Donaldson would be overwhelmingly superior in numbers. The only doubtful question was as to how many men in Southern Kansas, along the Osage, the Ossawatomie, and the Neosho streams might advance to the assistance of Lawrence. It was this point, especially on account of continued rumours that old John Brown had gathered a powerful company there, which led Colonel Mendenhall to make every effort to obtain information from his prisoner in the block house. All the ingenuity of brutal physical punishment known to Captain Buckskin Bill had, however, been used, without eliciting a single fact, and culminated only in reducing the prisoner to a condition of unconscious prostration, in

which state Mendenhall ordered him to be left, chained to the floor.

The rough cavalcade having ridden away, silence once more settled over the quiet village of Star Cross.

Barbara Fairfax, walking in the parsonage garden and happening to follow the long path which approached the block house, had her attention arrested by a ray of sunshine, which, streaming under the laurel bushes, revealed the fact that the secret door, so recently disclosed by Philip, was thrown open. Barbara advanced cautiously, till, passing into the small stockade-surrounded enclosure, she was astonished to discover Philip mounted upon the top of a garden bench, gesticulating before the bars of the small window which opened into the block house.

"Arise, poltroon Patroclus! What, art dead? Then take this dart." Thus exclaiming, Philip raised a cane pea-shooter to his lips and sent a pellet savagely through the window, noting its effect upon his chained and helpless victim with a chuckle of delight. Barbara's astonishment, mingled with a sense of the ridiculousness of Philip's conduct, almost instantly gave way to a feeling of indignation and disgust. She ran swiftly to the seat and clasping the boy in her arms, lifted him down, crutches and all, and set him forcibly upon the ground.

"I call that cowardly conduct, Philip. It makes me ashamed to think you are my brother!"

"Bab, don't you call me a coward, I'd like you to know, and that fellow in there, too, that I'm a Southern gentle-

man and no coward. It's abolitionists and niggers that are cowards and sneaks. That wretch ought to have been lynched, or they ought to have flogged him to death last night. He's a spy and a traitor and a cur. I'd like to riddle him!"

"Philip, you are angry and cruel. No Southern gentleman would ill-treat a captive."

"Ill-treat him! I say he ought to be killed! All abolitionists ought to be killed if they come down South. They're poison, and if we don't kill them they'll infect the whole country. Look at our slaves; they're all getting the disease, the black vermin. Let me get up there again and pepper that villain till he confesses his sins!"

Barbara was about to hasten her brother away, when a deep voice, but in tones painfully strained, spoke from within the block house.

"Is that a woman? I ask for water! Water!"

Something like a stifled groan followed. Philip smiled triumphantly.

"There, I stirred him up. He's not dead, the nigger thief."

But Barbara hurried him back into the garden.

Shutting the door behind them she cried:

"I shall tell father of this and have the door nailed up. It's not our business to interfere with Colonel Mendenhall's prisoners."

"Yes, it is our business too; you're always wrong. It's our business to watch 'em, and watch the niggers!

That's what I'm doing. Mark me, if we don't, they'll liberate him."

"You've nothing to do with it, you little silly; all you care for is the chance to torture people."

A female slave was coming down the garden path with Master Philip's chair. Into this Barbara quickly had him lifted, and threatened dire punishment from their father if he dared to leave the garden again.

Then she went towards the house, intending to disclose the secret of the hidden door to the good rector.

Before she reached the house, however, she changed her mind. That strange letter of John Brown's had affected her curiously. Even through the night its words often mingled themselves with her thoughts of Mendenhall, and she found herself repeating, "The good we can do will not come easily; it must be bought with a price!"

Her first impression of interest in the prisoner deepened; his whole bearing, dirty and dishevelled as he was, moved her strangely. His face, lit by the calm light of steady eyes, showed none of the marks and indications of a violent and dangerous character. Even his name, as given in the letter, would not lend itself to the conception of an abolitionist, as formed in Barbara's mind. "Oliver Wentworth" sounded honest and true. Were abolitionists really only those who "heard the cry of the helpless" and "remembered them that are in bonds as bound with them?"

Instead of entering the house, she turned into the kitchen garden, and, going to the pump, filled a tin cup.

A few moments brought her back to the block house. Crouching upon the seat, and raising the cup to the window above her head, that the prisoner might see it, without seeing her, she called softly, "Here is water!"

For a moment or so there was no answer.

Barbara thought, "He has died of ill treatment, wounds and thirst!" She was about to draw down the cup, though she could not make up her mind to look again through the bars, when she heard a faint reply:

"Water! . . . Where? . . . At the window! . . . Great heaven! What fiend's torture is this?"

A shudder trembled over Barbara's crouching form. She had forgotten that he was chained. Chained to the floor! He could not rise. He could not reach the window! The water began to spill from her trembling hands. She lowered the cup. Red with shame, she rose and hurried rapidly to the secret door.

It was closed! As the door was skilfully fitted to the frame of the stockade, Barbara looked in vain for anything by which to determine its precise position. She tried with all her weight at several points, but fruitlessly. It was evident that Phil must have watched her from behind the shrubbery and taken this method of revenging himself.

Angered and distressed, with a quick sense of her absolute helplessness, Barbara scanned the high, sharpened stockades in every direction, but saw no possible escape. Phil was capable of carrying out her own threat of informing the rector. What a perfect trap she was in.

She hurried to the other end of the enclosure and tried the ordinary entrance. The solid doorway was securely locked. Turning back, she was suddenly rooted to the spot. The door of the block house, only a few feet from her, in the small surrounding space, was wide open, and just within lay the prisoner, chained to the wall. His face, bruised and stained, was dreadful with the agony of thirst. His eyes, fixed upon Barbara, were filled with speechless astonishment, reflecting her own.

The pitifulness of his position was so appealing that Barbara forgot her own embarrassment, and, with a half cry, she flew to the bench beneath the window, took up the cup of water, and, carrying it to the door, passed in. Kneeling upon the rough boards, she held the cup to his lips.

A great sigh of relief followed the refreshing draught; he turned his eyes upon Barbara with a benediction of gratitude and murmured:

"Thank God! How I have prayed for this moment!" adding, "Help me off with these—these chains. The key hangs yonder. Part of their inhuman cruelty to leave it in my sight."

Barbara still knelt before him, with the emptied cup in her hand, stupified with wonder! Before she recovered her self-possesion he raised himself, the drink of water wonderfully reviving him, and, looking beseechingly in Barbara's face, said hurriedly, though not ungently:

"Hasten! In God's name!"

Barbara found voice enough at last to answer: "Sir, you are under a delusion of some sort."

Now that he was reviving, the sense of her own predicament returned forcibly to mind and weakened her regard for him.

"Delusion? How? I accept your merciful assistance without question."

"You seem to think I came to liberate you!"

"For what other reason could you come?"

Barbara looked her confusion.

"It is true," he went on, "that I rather expected help to come from the slaves than from a friendly sympathiser, but——"

"I am no sympathiser."

"No?"

"I am a Southerner, and loyal to my own. You—you are a slave stealer! An abolitionist! Do you suppose I would lift a hand to remove your chains?"

"Then that cup of water was a cordial, to revive me for torture?"

"Oh, no, no!" Barbara cried. "I pitied you," she stammered. She tried to explain in a confused way that she heard him call for water. Then she flung at him the burden of her own embarrassing position, as though it were his fault. "I must not be discovered here," she cried, "I must not. I will not!" She stood erect, looking about the dim chamber for some means of escape. "Is there nothing here? Not a chair?"

"Nothing."

His tone was exasperating.

"If you were a Southerner," she cried, "if you were a gentleman, I should know what to do."

He answered with a heartless groan and turned uneasily in his chains.

"Then I could trust you," she went on in sudden eagerness. "Then I might take the key and unlock your chains, and you would climb the stockade, open the door for me and come back, proud of the privilege of service to a woman in distress. That's what you would do, if you were a Southerner, and a——" Barbara hesitated over the last taunting word, but she finished it, "and a gentleman!"

Oliver turned upon her a deep, searching look. With an effort of will she answered it defiantly. But the rich colour stole softly over her clear cheeks and smooth brow, causing her dark eyes to shine with greater brilliance.

"I will do it," Oliver said softly. He kept his eyes upon her, though Barbara turned away.

In a moment more she was stooping over him, placing the key in the heavy manacles at his feet.

"Now here," he cried, lifting his hands. Her head bent low to discover the lock. Her hair almost brushed his cheek.

"Hold!" he cried, in an unsteady voice. "If I take advantage of this chance? If I——"

"I will trust you," Barbara said slowly, and turned the key.

The heavy chains slid to the floor.

For an instant he lay still, his eyes steadily filling with delight. Then he sprang to his feet, took a tremendous breath, threw back his big shoulders, and stretched himself painfully.

"Those chains," he muttered somewhat fiercely, "how they have stiffened me. But, by heaven, it is good to be free."

"Yes, yes, but make haste!" Barbara cried hurriedly. "Any moment they may be here, and I must not be discovered."

Oliver obediently followed her to the surrounding enclosure.

"The door," she cried, "is here," laying her hand upon the palisades. "It is easily seen from the garden side, and the latch is on this cross piece."

Oliver lifted his arms to the confronting wall. He was helplessly stiff and incapable of any vigourous effort.

"You see," he said turning slowly, "these stockades are at least twelve feet high. And in the condition to which your friends have brought me, I simply cannot leap a foot!"

Barbara looked at him aghast.

He only smiled, with the slightest suggestion of indifference to her dilemma.

"You can if you would," she cried at him angrily. "If it were for yourself, if your own liberty were at stake, you would not stand idly there!"

"I am bruised from head to foot. It is physically impossible for me to do more than hobble, much as I wish I could be of use to you. Still, as you say, if the incentive were my own liberty! . . . May it be? Will you not let it be?" he approached her with appealing look.

She was about to berate him for deceiving her. But at that moment voices were plainly heard on the village road.

Barbara turned white, and, with pressed lips, clasped her hands. Oliver's eye fell upon the rustic seat, set beneath the window of his prison. He caught it up, turned it on end, placed it against the wall, and, standing upon it, lifted himself to the top of the high stockade. He let himself drop on the other side with a stifled groan, as every bone in his body ached and every muscle was swollen. Barbara could scarcely suppress a cry of joy, when, after what seemed an eternal moment, he opened the secret door and came towards her.

She sprang to him, grasped his arm, and hurried him to the block house.

"They are almost at the door," she cried. "Quick, quick, the chains. Put in your feet here. Now your hands. Thank Heaven, I am safe." As she turned to fly she whispered, "They are at the door. I shall never see you again, but I am glad I trusted you, Mr. Wentworth. I—good-by."

Barbara, as she ran through the small enclosure sur-

rounding the block house, fortunately had the forethought to drag with her the garden seat.

Oliver, hearing the closing door, muttered fiercely: "Are you fiend or woman!"

CHAPTER VII

MR. FAIRFAX was too fat and short of breath to ascend the hill to the block house with any rapidity, and the small slave boy pushing Philip's chair had as much as he could do without attempting to go any faster than the rector. Thus it was that Barbara heard the approach in time to effect her escape.

The astonishment of Master Philip, when Moses opened the heavy door and found the prisoner undisturbed and alone, was so complete that he offered no resistance to his father's furious chiding, nor to the actual orders that he should be immediately carried to his bed and confined there for the next twenty-four hours.

Barbara had ever been the rector's favourite child, and now he was doubly vexed, first that he should have been once more duped by the mischievous inventions of Philip, and then that he should have allowed himself to suspect Barbara, whom he felt he ought rather to have held above any possible calumniation by her brother. When a little later he returned to the parsonage and recited the affair to his wife and daughter, Barbara immediately suggested that the key of the block house should not be left to the care of old Moses any longer, for, as she said, "It would,

of course, be through some of the slaves that the prisoner would receive aid towards escape, and it seemed foolish to leave the responsibility with one of them, especially when Moses was actually under some suspicion already."

"Why not have the key left with us, father?" she asked. "We should then know that it was perfectly safe, and Theophilus could come for it at meal times, when old 'Mammy Mine' has to climb the hill with the prisoner's rations."

"That is an excellent suggestion, Barbara, I shall have it done. And to make sure that Master Phil plays us no tricks, I shall ask you, Barbara, to take personal charge of it."

That night when Barbara went to her room, the key rested upon her bosom, carefully tucked beneath the folds of white lace.

Seating herself at the window, she gazed dreamily into the moonlit garden.

Oliver Wentworth had been well fed that afternoon. Mammy Mine carried up the hill unusual rations—wine jelly, meat and fruit. Barbara could not fail in gratitude for a service honourably rendered. At the same time, she told herself as she sat at the window thinking over her adventure, that the prisoner's manner was far from expressing the delicate courtesy of Colonel Mendenhall's studied deference.

"I don't understand it," she meditated. "It is impossible that our people are all wrong and always have been! As father says, slavery is the main institution of the

South and no one has a right to attack it. Father always speaks of that. He says, 'How dare they attack the great institution of slavery?' Still, there are things in the Bible. I've seen texts that seem to teach freedom for all men. All old customs are not right, I suppose. I wonder what an institution is? There must be something older still. Perhaps the greatest institution is God!" The soft, glowing light in her eyes mellowed to a still calmer expression.

In a little while her thoughts again returned to the particular cause of her meditations. His very name seemed in some sort to hold her with a spell. At least she repeated it a number of times.

"I am his keeper," she said with a strange smile, laying her hand over the key. Then she drew forth a crumpled paper, smoothed it, turned it till the moonlight flooded silver radiance over the rigid lines of small, stiff writing, and fell to perusing them seriously.

"Nothing less than a holy passion can purge from the world its most deadly sin. The cry of those who have no helper. The sight of those whose tears are ever in their eyes. The cause of God's oppressed."

Not very long was she thus occupied before her gentle breathing grew irregular; her eyes slowly filled with gathering tears.

"It will not come easily. It must be bought with a price. For Christ's sake."

She laid her head upon her arms and sobbed.

A moment later she was alert again and on her feet.

Passing swiftly across the room, catching up a long, grey cloak and feathery wrap, she glided noiselessly down the stairs and out into the quiet night. At the secret door to the enclosure surrounding the block house she hesitated. The prisoner was singing in a low voice.

"When other helpers fail and comforts flee."

Barbara stood irresolute. But presently, forcing her courage, she advanced slowly and stood in the open doorway. The moon made the night almost as light as day, but within the building there was deep shadow.

Oliver evidently recognised his visitor, for he said at once:

"Then you have the heart of a woman and have come back?"

Barbara's whole soul was tender towards him, both from her previous meditations and from his pathetic condition, but she was naturally imperious; it was hard for her to be taught. Oliver's words immediately piqued her. There was an insinuation of repentance. The tenderness, however, ameliorated the sense of offence, and she only said quietly:

"Have you had enough to eat?"

Oliver replied that he had learned from the coloured woman to whom he was indebted for such comforts, and hastened to express, with the best grace he could, his sense of gratitude to one from whom he had no reason to expect either sympathy or assistance. It was evident, however, that the prisoner forced his words. He either mistrusted

the motive of the giver, or had anticipated some very different form of relief.

Barbara laughed away both his attempted gratitude and his ill-concealed dissatisfaction.

"These ridiculous niggers," she cried, "they act a babies' pantomime every day. 'Mammy Mine' declared before the Virgin she would not let you know where the dainties came from. You will please forget and never remember, for quite unpleasant consequences would fall to me should my father have the slightest suspicion of——"

"But, surely, even your father," Oliver interrupted, "could not possibly find fault with such an act of Christian charity."

"Christian charity! Indeed, you must have queer ideas of what we Southerners think of slave stealers!"

"But I am not a slave stealer!"

"Oh, it's the same thing. If you sympathise with the slaves, if you even speak of ever making them free, if you are opposed to the great institution of the South, you are a traitor; you are defying the sovereign rights of our country, and that makes you worse than the slaves themselves!"

"Worse than the slaves?"

"Oh, yes, a great deal worse. The slaves are all right when they are properly managed, but the abolitionists,—and I suppose you are one of them,—the abolitionists are trying to ruin us. And they don't go about it openly; they are traitors!"

Oliver was really surprised at the girl's vehemence and apt delineation of the Southerner's point of view, but Barbara herself tossed her head with a gesture of disgust for the whole business.

"That's what all Southerners think," she said, adding, "and I am a Southerner."

Oliver thought he detected in her voice, in these last words, a hint of some subtle regret, and he responded quickly:

"That cannot be true of all who live here. Even a Southerner born and bred might be a heretic as regards slavery. Might see something of the truth as we Northerners see it."

He was surprised to find Barbara respond at once to this suggestion.

"I thought so of the North!" she replied. "Not all Northerners need be against us."

The implied inference was perhaps emphasised to Oliver by what seemed an almost imperceptible movement on the part of Barbara, a movement of approach to him. In his condition the least expression of sympathy was affecting, and thinking at the moment more of the girl than the cause, he ventured:

"I would that I might be in no way opposed to you." Barbara met his suggestion with alacrity.

"It is good of you to say that. I wish it very much. Because—because——"

Her momentary hesitation conveyed an extraordinary

sensation of happiness to Oliver. He had been feeling so utterly outcast, hopeless and alone.

"Because," Barbara continued, "that is why I came here tonight. Why I dared. Do you understand?" She made an impressive gesture, to which Oliver at once replied:

"I felt sure from the first that—that it would be possible for us to understand each other."

"That is what I hoped," she cried with real earnestness. "And, therefore, Mr. Wentworth, I determined to trust you. I have come here to set you free!"

Those words in Oliver's ears were as spring waters in a burning desert. Joy overcame him, and for a moment there was a stifled silence, while he commanded his voice, saying at last:

"My words can give but a poor acknowledgment of the gratitude I feel, but I hope heaven will grant me some day the opportunity to prove to you my sincerity, my devotion."

Barbara did not interrupt him; the sound of his voice with its deep tone of evident emotion stirred her. But when he went on to speak of what he feared might be the unpleasant consequences to herself when this generous act of hers became known, she said readily enough:

"Never mind my risk. All I ask of you, Mr. Wentworth, is your word that you will take no further part in this attempt to steal our slaves, and destroy our institutions; that you will not remain anywhere in this danger-

ous neighbourhood, but will promise me to go back at once to your own friends in New England."

Oliver's chained hands moved in a surprised gesture. His mobile face darkened and he pressed his lips hard for a moment before he said, with quiet composure:

"It is impossible for me to promise that."

It was now Barbara's turn to be surprised.

"I see no impossibility in your choosing an honourable escape from a felon's death."

"My life is not my own, either to save or to lose; it is in bond for others."

"Why," cried Barbara, growing impatient at this opposition to her plans and wishes, "if you die here, what good will that do your friends? The least you can do for them, for yourself, for me, for everybody, is to go back."

"There are too few pledged to this cause for even the humblest to turn back."

"You are stubborn, Mr. Wentworth; you are obstinate. You seem to wish to oppose me, and just as I thought it was all settled."

"Nay! Not so. I would that I might do everything you ask, but to desert those who are waiting for me, even now. I ought to be——"

"Hastening to join John Brown, I suppose; a fanatic, a brawler and fighter, who quotes Scripture while he kidnaps slaves!"

"No, a hero, a truth seeker, a servant of God."

Fired by his own great longing for service in the cause to which he was pledged, Oliver began to declare to the girl the passion for liberty that inspired the few devoted followers of John Brown.

He pleaded with all the earnestness of his heart, but he pleaded in vain.

"It is impossible for me to remain any longer," Barbara said at last. "My cause is not yours; it never can be. You think your own the only way. You are not willing to refrain from doing your utmost to ruin and destroy our beloved South. It is insulting!"

Barbara turned as if to leave. Then stopped suddenly, looked at the helpless prisoner, moved impetuously near him, and exclaimed, "Why are you so stubborn? I give you one more chance!"

For a moment there was painful silence. Then wearily, as though the effort he had already made exhausted him, Oliver answered slowly:

"What you offer is not freedom. It would be Hell! Better these chains, and death, than to turn back, a coward and a deserter!"

"You treat me shamefully!" she cried. "You have no gallantry, you Northerners! To think how I have exerted myself in your behalf! It is abominable!" and Barbara hurried away.

Carefully closing the secret door, and pulling back the laurel bushes that screened the entrance, she tossed up her smooth forehead in the moonlight, shaking back the escaping waves of hair that curled, black as jet, upon

the soft gray wrap. Her deep blue eyes were glowing, and a murmurous sigh, not of relief, but of excitement, escaped from her lips, as she breathed softly to herself: "How noble he is! I could have renounced every tie that binds me to the South, when he appealed so for the slaves; and when he said: 'Better these chains and death, than turn back, a coward and a deserter! I positively, almost—well, he didn't know what I felt, thank heaven!"

Thus meditating Barbara hastened through the lower end of the rectory garden, to a little gate opening upon the village road. Descending the hill, she approached the rear of the Moses house, and rapped upon the window, where a dim light, burning within, showed that the occupants were not yet in bed.

In a few moments old Mammy Mine opened the back door, and tremulously looked about. Seeing Barbara beckoning and making signs, she half closed the door behind her and came out.

"The Lord a' mercy, Missy! Is they sickness at the house?"

"Be quiet, mammy, there's no sickness. I've brought back the papers you found at Chute's."

Then Barbara unfolded to the faithful "mammy" her purpose towards the prisoner in the block house.

It was just as the moon was setting in the western plains, and darkness certain for the few hours before dawn, that Oliver, freed from his chains, came stealthily down the hill, to the ford at the bend of the river. Bar-

bara had so arranged it that he attributed his fortunate release not to her, but entirely to the devotion of the slave.

He had from her his stolen money, amounting to several hundred dollars, intended for John Brown's pressing needs, once more in the bosom of his shirt. He left "Mammy mine" striking herself about the face and shoulders, with the chains he had just thrown off, that it might appear she had not allowed the prisoner's escape without a struggle. Oliver had promised to discover for her the actual fate of her son Early. As he reached the edge of the ford, he hesitated, doubtful if in the darkness he could make the passage. His uncertainty, however, was dispelled by a voice at his elbow whispering:

"Hold on, Marse, hold on for a minute! Mammy mine she told me to be watchin' for ye on de hill side, but Marse, he walked like de bogie man, most too fast for nigger boy."

"What do you want, my boy?" Oliver asked, feeling he had nothing to fear from the slaves, yet curious to know what this hasty messenger might portend.

"Want to keep Marse's boots dry," Toffy responded. At the same time he glided along the edge of the stream, and, in a moment more, had the punt loosed, and brought to within reach of the point where Oliver stood.

"You must have eyes like a cat," Oliver said, as they crossed in the blackness, and ran aground in the mouth of the opposite road.

"Lor', bless Marse, 'taint Toffy's eyes; ther's hands on her nose a pullin' of her over."

"What!" Oliver cried, for a moment thinking after all he might be in a trap. "Hands on the boat!"

"Heav'nly hands, Marse, de pore slaves' guidin' angels, they takes me many times through the black ob de night. Mighty God, he send 'em to Toffy, cos he hears de big prayer in de pore little nigger's heart, 'cos he knows great heap ob faith down in there."

Toffy pushed off again, saying: "De mighty Lord bless y'r footsteps, Marse, an' lead ye to de heav'nly kingdom for de pore slaves' sakes."

CHAPTER VIII

OLIVER was weak and sore from his close confinement in the block house. After a few miles, along a road that wriggled in and out of creeks, winding about the margin of burnt timber land, and climbing crests of hills that, in the darkness, seemed impossibly frequent, he found himself utterly exhausted. When daylight at last came creeping in, he made up his mind that unless he could secure a horse, he would never see Brown's camp. He therefore turned from the road, here ascending an open bluff, and took a wagon track, through a rough clearing, which from recent ruts and hoof prints, evidently led to an occupied settlement. His purpose was more easily planned, however, than fulfilled. His appearance alone was sufficiently bad to create suspicion; he was worn, haggard, excited, and bore all the marks of his severe prison punishment. He had not yet been days enough in the West, to have caught the knack of imitating even in the roughest way, the peculiar idiom and drawl of the popular tongue. It was almost certain that he would be recognised as a Yankee, and from his appearance immediately regarded as a suspicious person. Then, again, he must have some plausible story to account for his situation. If he showed

himself to have money, the chances were that he would immediately be followed, and robbed, if not murdered in the woods. Yet without the ready offer of something more than a fair price, he realised that hours at least would be consumed when even moments were precious.

With mind thus perplexed, Oliver came suddenly upon a considerable clearing, where were a couple of large roomy cabins, cattle shelters, and other evidences of the industry of white settlers. Before he could make further observations, a group of four or five men and boys at the door of the barn were observing him curiously. Without an instant's delay, Oliver formulated his plan of action. He swaggeringly advanced upon the men, whom he rightly judged were Germans. In a loud and blustering voice, he shouted forth a string of the most damnatory adjectives he could command, interjecting low Dutch expletives here and there, and concluding with a terrific demand that the —— —— niggers they were concealing, be forthwith surrendered.

"Mein Gott! there havn't any niggers been in these place, since a year!" cried the stoutest of the startled group. But the rest of the men were sidling back into the barn, with evident timidity, and Oliver felt his first move was effective. He therefore followed it up energetically. Lifting his hand menacingly to his hip pocket, he declared with a few more random oaths, that he was a search officer from St. Louis, that the niggers had been tracked to Star Cross and from there to these woods. "Don't you know the law?" he thundered; "you've got

to furnish me aid to search for these niggers through the woods; I know they are here. If you refuse, I will have to go back to the nearest marshal and bring up a force large enough," and Oliver looked tremendously threatening.

As the fat German only muttered inarticulate gutturals which did not seem to indicate assent, Oliver seized him by the shoulder, crying: "Look here, you lager vat you, do you want a sheriff's posse to clean out the whole kit of you?"

"Mein Gott, no! The t'ousand teufels is better nor one sheeriff. Vat you want of me to do! Mein Gott, I dell's you there ain't never one nigger about here, nowheres."

"I've a couple of men back on the creek half a mile or so. You let me have one of your smartest fellows here, put him on a good mount, and if we don't round up the sneak niggers by noon time your old frau can boil the usual sausages, otherwise there'll be three extra empty skins to fill. D'ye get that into your Dutch skull?"

The German swore a little himself this time; they were going to "string a fence, and hadn't a man to spare, it was all,"—but Oliver cut him short with another threat of a sheriff's posse, and the old German gave the word to one of his boys to accompany the supposed search officer. Oliver was well pleased to see the boy saddle a bony-looking mule, that was sleek and in the best of condition for hard work. Getting back to the road, Oliver had in the meantime discovered that the young

German was a strong free soiler, that he and his brothers were sympathisers and had in consequence suffered much, so much that they were thinking even now of quitting Missouri. Fortune thus favouring him, Oliver changed his method, revealed the true state of affairs to the German, who at once volunteered to help him. "Can I depend on this mule?" was Oliver's query.

"Dot is a better beast nor any one else, what is in Missouri," was the answer. But for the sake of the cause the mule was Oliver's, and a hundred dollar bill went back with the young German.

Good information as to roads and distances had also been communicated, and Oliver putting the mule to a steady, swinging gait, began to feel secure in his escape.

Daylight was beginning to paint the whole world about him with rich and wondrous tints, birds were twittering, chirping, singing. Radiance and perfume, and glory, were gathering every moment, wafting over the waking earth and filling the air.

Six weeks ago Oliver had been studying law, and he laughed to himself as the extraordinary changes which had occurred in so short a time rapidly passed through his mind. Was he in vivid reality hurrying along Missouri roads, having but a few hours escaped from horrible confinement, and even brutal torture, at the hands of those who were at least fellow countrymen. What a revelation of the real state of affairs it was.

A cloud of dust suddenly appearing on the road before him, and the sound of boisterous laughter, warned him

of approaching danger. Instantly he slipped from the saddle and forcing a way through the loosely laid fence, he had just time to hurry the mule through, and secrete himself behind a clump of black birch, before a cavalcade of southern rangers, returning with re-captured runaway slaves, appeared. Peering under the birch twigs, Oliver could see the negroes hitched in pairs before the horses, to the tongue of the leading wagon. They were stripped to the waist, their swarthy skins wet with mingled sweat and blood. A stout sapling, lashed to their necks, bound each pair together. Oliver shrank from the look of despairing fear on their haggard faces.

The appearance of the raiders themselves, might, under other circumstances, have provoked amusement. To the front of the wagon bed, a tall hickory pole was lashed, on the point of which an empty whiskey bottle jangled. Below was a streamer of fine hemp, and a red shirt tied by the sleeves. On the soiled wagon cover, the legend, "Hell, not Kansas, for the abolitionists," painted in rainbow colours. Several half tipsy campaigners were dangling their muddy boots from the wagon seat. The driver flourished a huge ox whip, the knotted thong bringing screams from the terrified negroes, whenever with an oath, it was sent hissing about their heads. Following the wagon, half a dozen unshaven and disorderly looking men rode on horses robbed from the farmers along the way. These men all carried rifles, had big bowie knives, stuck conspicuously in their belts, and appeared to be in boisterously good spirits. Another wagon contained

"the spoil," a medley of plunder from wrecked abolition houses, furniture, shotguns, articles of clothing, and boxes of groceries. At the end of the troop, a drove of cattle were being hustled along out of the territory.

Oliver groaned in spirit, at his inability to interfere, yet he thanked his good fortune, that he had not blundered into a meeting, which would have cost him another delay in reaching Brown's camp, if not a worse fate.

As soon as the noise and dust subsided, he picked his way out onto the road, and resumed his journey. Before noon he was across the border. The country was more open, though still rolling, and the prairie roads made better traveling, while the thought that he was once more in Kansas, and nearing his destination, served to cheer him on.

But in spite of such encouragement, and although the air about him was pearly bright, and the sky overhead like a dome of opal, Oliver's mood was gloomy, his spirits depressed. The horror of the reality of slavery had been driven home to his heart, in a way he could not ignore. In theory, he had already been won to take up arms against a great wrong, but now, his young blood was fired with a very passion of indignation. From the facts, his mind turned to remedies, and he wondered what possible headway such a handful of men as Brown was likely to muster could make against this enormous power of the solid warlike South! Youth, however, and the springing pulse of health, flung away doubts that might have given pause to maturer minds, and unconscious that

he was not still meditating upon the great task of "liberation," Oliver found himself picturing the face of Barbara Fairfax, as he saw her first at the window of his prison. The beauty of her splendid eyes, and the grace of her exquisite features, charms recognised by everyone, were made more dangerous to Oliver, by his sense of absolute immunity from risk. He could freely give rein to his fancy, allow his imagination to weave what grace and enchantments it might about that face, for under no conceivable circumstances could she be anything to him beyond the strange, romantic memory which already haunted him. So easily, so innocently, youth sips the cup, age cannot drain!

Presently observing a small shanty, on a hill, a little way from the road, and hoping that it might prove a friendly settlement, where he could feed his mule, Oliver rode up. It was a clean, thrifty-looking place, in striking contrast to the cabins of Missouri. Two very small children were on the threshold. At Oliver's approach they sat staring in dumb astonishment.

"Hello, babies! Is mother at home?" he cried cheerfully. But the children scrambled hastily to their feet, and giving him a look of frightened dismay, promptly hid behind the open door.

Laughingly, Oliver dismounted, expecting the sound of his voice, and the children's scramble would announce his arrival. No one appearing, however, he put his head inside. There was the usual one-roomed shanty, but strange signs of disturbance. An overthrown table, food

on the floor, a broken bottle, and a rummage of bed covers and clothing, flung down in utter confusion. Peeping behind the door, Oliver, in his gentlest and most coaxing voice, asked:

"Where's your mammy, little ones?" Immediately a terrified bellowing burst from both the sturdy children at once. Then they clutched each other, and buried their faces against the wall. "Well," thought Oliver, "that will bring out the mother."

But no mother came. Not even a dog answered the children's cries. Oliver took his mule to a roughly built shelter, a few rods from the house. There were no tie ropes, but there was plenty of good hay, and leaving his mule, he returned to the house.

The little children, thinking he had gone, came peering out, their red cheeks dabbled and blotched with the marks of plump fists rubbed through tears. Seeing Oliver once more approaching them, there was another screaming flight.

"Why, you little butter balls you, what are you frightened about?" he laughed at them. And looking once more into the room, it occurred to him that the children had been witnesses of some violent scene.

"Poor little beggars, they are all in a tremble," he muttered, noticing the shaking condition of the little ones. Then he went in, and busied himself to soothe the children's fears. Soon he had them up on his knees, and content to let him wipe their bedabbled faces. But con-

solation was yet far from their hearts, for the bigger one kept mumbling:

"Bub wants mammy," and the smaller one incessantly responded, "Me wants daddy."

Seeing signs of drowsiness on the sad little faces, Oliver bethought him to get them to sleep. So gathering scattered clothes from over the floor, he made a comfortable nest, in which he persuaded the children to play they were waiting for the big birds to come home.

> "Hush, little birdies, we're flying to thee,
> Mother bird, father bird, over the sea;
> Hush, little birdies, don't cry till you see
> Mother bird, father bird, flying to thee."

As the children slowly sank into happy slumber, beneath the mellow notes of his singing, Oliver lowered his voice and presently ceased. As he did so he fancied he heard the sound of a distant cry. Listening more attentively, he was certain that he could detect a piteous human wailing. He rose at once, and went out. Beyond the road, at the foot of the rising ground, a strip of timber widening from a point, ran towards the river. The cry seemed to come from that direction. Oliver hastened down. The yelp of a dog now sounded from the same place, and Oliver halted, thinking after all, it was nothing more than hounds after a woodcock. But again across the sun-filled, perfumed air, a heart-rending wail, between a moan of despair, and a shriek of pain, smote upon his ear. There was no longer the least doubt that some

tragedy had happened, and Oliver pushed quickly forward. He heard the dog, now in a long drawn howl, which was certainly no hunting cry. Entering the rough underbrush, everything seemed perfectly still again. He struck across, several times, before discovering a definite path; then he came upon a clear opening for a dozen rods, and the sight which presented itself to his horrified gaze was a ghastly one. A young man, bare-headed, was bound with his back to a tree, his legs and arms bent to half surround it. His head hung forward sideways upon his breast, the yellow hair hiding the upper part of his face. His mouth and chin were bathed in blood, which dripped over his torn shirt.

Oliver paused an instant in sheer horror, muttering between clenched teeth:

"What damnable butchery is this?"

Suddenly the same moaning cry which he had already heard, rose again, and he perceived the prostrate form of a woman, lying motionless at the feet of the disfigured man. Then he ran forward, and as he did so a sheep dog leapt up from the side of the woman, and began to bark furiously. At which the woman raised her head, and screamed, and hid it again.

"In the name of heaven, what has happened here?" Oliver cried, half suspecting that this was the work of the murderous looking party of raiders, which passed him in the early morning.

"Tell me, I am a friend; I am a Free-Stater, a Yankee, an Abolitionist, a hater of slavery, and all its damnable

methods." Oliver had never before so definitely branded himself, but his heart was burning against this murder-inciting evil.

The woman sat bolt upright. She stared a moment at Oliver's glowing face, and proclaiming eyes, and then burst out of her moaning into a flood of tears.

"Come, come, tell me. Is this your husband? Nerve yourself. Make haste and help me to release him. Would that I had a knife."

The woman made no motion, but groaned between her sobs:

"Dead! dead! dead!"

Oliver, advancing to the tree, saw that an enormous bowie knife was thrust through the man's breast, completely piercing it, the point firmly buried in the tree behind.

With the greatest difficulty, and only after long persuasion, did Oliver finally induce the woman to repeat to him the main facts of the tragedy, by which she was literally appalled and benumbed. When, at last, he led her up to the house, and showed her the children, sleeping unharmed, with smiles on their red parted lips, the wretched mother could neither weep nor rejoice. She and her husband had come from New England only six months ago. Her husband worked hard. Never interfered with anybody, at election he voted for a free State, that was all he ever did about it. Was eating breakfast when,—here a fixed stare turned the poor woman's face rigid, like the strained countenance of a hypnotized pa-

tient. The horror she could not describe, was seared upon her heart. But it was easy to understand the rest. The murderers were a large party; they had teams, and cattle, and slaves with them. Oliver needed no further description. This simple, hard-working settler had been hideously executed, as an example to all Free-Staters hardy enough to venture into Kansas. This incident delayed Oliver for some time, for though he felt the urgent importance of pushing forward on his own account, he could not do less than offer first to carry word to friends of the murdered man, with whom the wife and children might find protection.

CHAPTER IX

FORTUNATELY for Oliver, the friends to whom he carried the unwelcome tidings of this atrocious outrage, were well acquainted with the movements of Brown. He thus received directions, without which he might have found it impossible to make his way to the carefully concealed retreat, where the only man in Kansas who sufficiently combined daring and sagacity to successfully oppose the ruffianism of both official and unofficial slavery, now waited his opportunity to strike another blow.

After making the junction of the Pottawatomie with the Osage, Oliver's instructions were to ford the lesser stream, to a point of rough open land dividing the two, then to take a due westerly course, keeping to the middle of the widening river bottom, till he sighted a well-grown black walnut, with the lower limb split, and bent to the ground. At the walnut, a trail could be taken up, which if left to the south at every divide, circled the rising ground and led into the camp.

As he came to the river fork, the shades of night began to settle upon the earth. The mule snorted and blew on the water as he drank, but he was glad to get at it, for the road had been dusty and they had come far. Mount-

ing the opposite bank, a dismal stretch of low land lay to the west, but at the horizon, which in the veiled dimness of the grey twilight, might have been distant only a couple of miles, there was rising ground, with timber showing purple against the last flush of crimson still trembling toward the zenith.

Oliver reached the split walnut tree, as the first evening star gleamed across the rising mist. He turned to the north, and found he was ascending a wild wooded hillside, covered with tangled undergrowth.

After pushing on, with difficulty, for some distance, the mule suddenly stopped short.

"Advance, and give the password!" called a strong voice.

Thus challenged, Oliver replied:

"A friend to the friendless," and urged his mule forward, straining his eyes along the trail before him.

Nothing was visible, till a rifle barrel swung out before the mule's nose, and a sentry peered from behind a screen of twisted boughs.

"Halt again! Who are you? And on what business?"

When Oliver had given his name, and indicated that he was there to communicate with Captain Brown, the sentry came forward, cautiously at first, lowering his rifle, but pulling a cavalry revolver from his belt.

"Excuse our caution," he said, in a friendly tone; "but the old man's orders are rigid. You've got to dismount. Give up your arms. And go before me to the next sentry line."

The man expressed surprise at finding Oliver unarmed, and offered him some admirable advice upon the utter impropriety of entering the territory as though it were Boston Common. When Oliver, in explanation, told of his previous attempt to join the camp, of his capture, imprisonment, and recent escape, his guide showed great interest.

"Was it last Sunday night, you were at Ottawa Jones' place?"

"Yes. He left just after dark, promising to bring in a man who could pilot me to this camp. He had not been five minutes out of the house, when a banging on the door was followed by the crack of a rifle. When I opened the door, there was a negro shot in the head."

"A young fellow, about twenty?"

"Yes."

"Do you know his name?"

"Early Moses."

"He's in camp. Father has him in his own wagon, doctoring."

"Alive? I was leaning over him on the door step, when I was knocked senseless. Afterwards a coloured woman who planned my escape proved to be this fellow's mother. It will be glad tidings to her if he's alive, for I gave her no hope; I thought he died while I looked at him."

"Jones came into camp that night, told us his house was burning, his children in their night clothes, one of them sick, the ruffians left in the flames, but when they

rode off Jones' wife went in and saved her. Half our camp turned out and went up to his place. There wasn't a rag left when we got there. Jones told us on the way that he dropped the first man that attacked, but that after that they set the children out in the line of fire and kept themselves in the rear. When we got up there we found the man Jones shot was this negro, put out to save their own skins. We thought he was done for; besides a fractured skull, he was badly burned by the flames from the house. But father would not give him up. He was out of his head for two days, but tonight he's rational."

"Is your father an officer in Brown's army?"

Oliver's guide laughed lightly.

"Brown's army? I've heard the Missourians call us that. Brown is my father. I'm Watson Brown, but——"

Here they were halted by another sentry. After a few words Watson Brown announced that he would conduct Oliver in person to his father, and the second sentry was dispatched to the outer line of duty.

A few minutes more brought them to the camp itself. Oliver had already been surprised at the military precision evidently prevailing. He was still more interested in observing the care with which the situation of the camp had been chosen and the remarkable plans for security. The moon, now shining, revealed an astonishing neatness and cleanliness. The central group of wagons were arranged in a rectangular figure conforming to the rising ground. There was absolutely nothing to indicate the usual rough

and tumble appearance of a camp. But, on the other hand, he was still more surprised to perceive that probably not more than twenty or thirty men composed the army. It was the character of the leader, the mobility of his handful of men, the suddenness of their attacks, which had created the supposition that a large body of men were employed.

Watson, perceiving Oliver's curiosity, laughingly remarked:

"Not much of an army, is it? Father has Cromwell's notion, that discipline and God-fearing sobriety, rather than numbers, make success."

They were now within speaking distance of the wagons, and, as Oliver was still proceeding, Watson Brown laid a hand upon his arm, with a cautioning gesture.

Through an opening could be seen some twenty men drawn up in line, while facing them a man of magnificent bearing, standing with uncovered head, was reciting impressive passages from the Scriptures.

"Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

"The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants; and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate."

"The Lord looseth the prisoners; the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind; the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down."

"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

The firm convincing voice seemed to render the words full of immediate meaning.

"For now we live, if we stand fast in the Lord."

"Their foot shall slide in due time."

"Therefore be watchful; remember them that are in bonds as bound with them."

As the sonorous voice ceased Oliver knew that this could be no one but the old Puritan leader, John Brown. He was clean shaven, his strong, square-cut features suggesting a stern, inflexible will.

Watson stepped forward, while the men who had united in a hearty "Amen" turned to their camp beds for a night's rest. After saluting with military precision, Watson informed his father briefly of the arrival of Oliver Wentworth.

Constantly exposed to imminent peril, living in a network of tricks and schemes designed to entrap him by men who hesitated at no depth of treachery, Brown's manner, cold and vigilant, somewhat chilled the enthusiasm of the newcomer. But as Oliver gave an account of the experiences he had already endured in his attempt to reach the camp, of his capture, of his awful journey to Star Cross, and his adventures since, John Brown evidently warmed towards him. And when Oliver, burning against the savage barbarity exhibited by the slave power, declared his desire to fight for the cause, and to fight to such purpose that for every drop of

Northern blood shed a slave might be freed, the stern man's face responded with a gleam of approving joy; he laid a long, sinewy hand on Oliver's shoulder and looked searchingly in his eyes. Then he said:

"I accept you. In the name of the Eternal God I accept your consecration to this holy cause. You have hold of a great truth, when you see that this work means hardship. Few will uphold you in it. Talk, talk, talk, is the whole armoury of most of our Northern leaders. Watson, give him food and find him a blanket." And the tall figure, straight as a pine, moved away with long, springy stride.

Oliver was hungry enough to attack ravenously the plain camp rations of dried salt codfish, beans, and soda biscuit. But, at the same time, he managed to express to Watson his opinion that Captain Brown was injudicious in not allowing him to impart at once valuable information which he brought as to the movements of the Missourians. Watson, however, assured him that he need trouble himself very little on that account, it being in the first place almost certain that Captain Brown already was accurately informed, for Watson naively declared, "He generally is," and in the second place that his plans were always on such long lines that few changes in the conditions ever affected them.

Watson was not able to remain with the new recruit, being obliged to return to sentry duty, so that, after furnishing a couple of army blankets and recommending a suitable spot for his slumbers, he left him, and Oliver

soon was seeking sleep. The new surroundings were, however, so strange to him, and the experiences through which he had passed so exciting, that instead of slumbering, he lay listening to the heavy breathing of the men near him, to the piping frogs in the swamp below, the occasional stamping of horses, the tread of a sentry, or the wild, weird cry of a startled owl.

He may have thus wakefully mused for an hour, when from the shadows of overhanging foliage, where the moonlight made a shimmering circle, he saw a tall, lithe figure in grey military coat and cape, walking to and fro, apparently absorbed in thought. Presently the figure halted, then quietly approached, and stood by Oliver's feet.

Oliver ever afterwards blessed his wakefulness that night, for when the stern old Captain found he was not sleeping, he stretched himself beside him, and for several hours, in low, musical voice, seemingly attuned to the harmony of the night, thrilled the young man's responsive heart with a marvellous monologue, reflecting his own deepest meditations upon the dark sin of human slavery.

Oliver was often in the company of the great Captain afterwards, was by his side in battle, watched him in moments of high tension, and hours of intense depression, heard him when he spoke words that the world has never forgotten, and when he uttered the simple prayers of his heart among the few who were his faithful followers; but the recollection of that night lived more vividly than any other as a revelation of the unique personal char-

acter of this extraordinary man. From that night he became convinced that John Brown ranked among those of all ages who have wholly consecrated themselves to the service of the Eternal God.

CHAPTER X

ON the morning following Oliver's escape from Star Cross, Barbara Fairfax ran down almost before daylight to assure herself that there was really no prisoner in the block house. And while a little later old "Mammy Mine" was vigourously relating to the villagers at the door of the barber's shop how the prisoner overcame her, Barbara visited the desolate enclosure again, wondered at the darkness within the little building, and knelt by the massive stanchion, trying with her soft hands the weight of the chains.

Meanwhile her watchful brother Phil spied her out and, approaching cautiously, suddenly rattled his crutches, uttering at the same time an unearthly groan. Barbara started up in genuine alarm. Upon which Master Phil announced his conviction that his sister was in collusion with the prisoner and aided his escape.

"If there's any collusion," Barbara retorted with energy, "it's between you and Satan, you wicked little spying insolence. Some dreadful end is in store for you if you don't stop inventing such sly, wicked stories about people."

"I'd like to know what you've done," Phil queried,

keenly meditative. "You've done something pretty bad, or you wouldn't be so irritable."

"Now, Phil," Barbara cried despairingly, "with all your shameful deceptions, there's no sense in your pretending to be an idiot. What possible interest have I in a man who was willing to put his own life in danger for no better purpose than the liberation of the slaves?"

"That's true enough," answered Master Philip, eyeing his sister as a ferret might a rabbit, "but I've no confidence in your judgment. Fact is, if a thing's absurd, you're most likely to cotton to it."

However, they parted amicably, Barbara declaring there was no one who felt the unfortunate occurrence of the prisoner's escape more than she did. And this proved, indeed, to be accurately true. Barbara was perplexed and embarrassed. She upbraided herself for stupidity in allowing Oliver to rush away headlong into all the dangers that most certainly would await him, as an advocate of freedom, in the neighbouring territory. Was it not the chief object of Colonel Mendenhall's armed expedition to crush out all opposition to slavery? What a fool she had been. It was as likely as not that this inexperienced young Easterner would fall in the very way of the Missourian forces, and little chance would he have of a second escape. A few hours thinking it over sufficed to drive Barbara to a distraction of anxiety. She fled to her cushioned corner. But whatever she read, the same tilting thoughts made a tourney ground of her mind. Finally she took two of the big deer hounds down

to the creek. And while she stood at the ford, the dogs bounding in and out at her bidding, the same band of returning slave catchers which passed Oliver Wentworth, as he hid in the wood, came down to the water's edge from the opposite side.

When the wretched slaves, yoked together before the horses, came in sight of the water, they screamed and wept. Burning thirst had driven them almost insane. As Barbara looked at them she shrank back in horror. Bruised and bloody, they were indeed fit objects to excite the pity of any beholder. But when, in contrast to the deplorable condition of the slaves, Barbara looked up at the brutal gang of ruffians, claiming ownership of the lives and bodies of the abused negroes, her heart throbbed with fierce indignation. She went moodily back to the house, and even the joyous cat-birds fussing over nest-building in the syringa bushes could not make her look up.

At the house she found waiting for her a letter from Aunt Abbie, in which, among the many items of Boston social gossip, the wonderful lyceum lectures of Mr. Emerson and Mr. Alcott and the astonishing sermons of Mr. Parker, Aunt Abbie said: "I hope some of you will look up my poor protégé, William Gibson, and his nice little New England wife, that was Annie Thomson, my housemaid. You know, William was a very respectable market gardener here, and about four years ago he married our Annie. We hated to lose the girl, but human nature is human nature, in spite of all one may say,

and they did seem a quite proper young couple, so we gave Annie a good deal of help in furnishing their little house, and altogether felt very deeply interested in their welfare. Well, six months ago, William sold out his business and off they went, bag and baggage, and two fat little bits of children to your inhospitable Kansas. Such a time as they had getting there! And poor Annie writes back that she cries every day, she is so homesick. Now what I say is, why can you not drive over and encourage the young thing to cheer up? I have not the remotest idea of how far they are from Star Cross, but then you Westerners seem to think nothing at all of distances, and as you are always speaking of the doings in Kansas, I suppose it is in the circle of your extensive rides. Here is the mysterious symbolism Annie sends, which she declares everybody understands 'out West,' so I suppose you can: Lykins Co., Range 19, Township 22, S. W., half of section 6. If those hieroglyphics can tell you where they live, the West must indeed be a wonderful place. To be sure, you won't sympathise with poor William wanting to aid the Free Staters, but then his wife, I suppose, feels just as homesick, as though her husband were a Southerner! And the little babies. I wish, Barbara could see them; she was always so fond of dolls when she was a baby herself."

It was this passage that awakened in Barbara's heart an immediate response. And she cried out to her mother, who was reading the letter aloud:

"Mother, I'm going! Why, it will be the greatest fun

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in the world! I'm just going to find out where they are, and carry them over a whole lot of your jellies and things, that will make them think heaven's in Missouri."

"Well, I'm sure, Barbara," her mother answered, "you always were ready to do the most reckless things, but I should think you were crazy indeed if you attempted any such journey as that."

However, Miss Barbara had other reasons than those she disclosed, and they were of that compelling nature, only the more persistent because unacknowledged. Go she would, and go she did.

The very next morning, as the fragrance of acanthus buds in the parsonage garden, mingling with perfume from a grove of papaya trees on the river bank, filled the dew-misty air till the valley was like a great incense cup, Barbara rode down to the ford, closely followed by Theophilus Moses on a quick stepping little mule, the saddle bags extended with "good things" from the Fairfax larder.

The hollow between the steep banks at the ford was brimming with a delicate golden haze, quivering through and through with tremulous ripples from the half veiled stream beneath.

With eager heart, full of the adventurous possibilities of the journey, Barbara urged her horse till he splashed into the sparkling water. But as he did so a panic seized him: he whirled about and the fat mule, being but a length in the rear, they came into rapid collision. The cause of the fright was immediately disclosed by the appearance

out of the golden haze of the black face and gleaming eyes of "Mammy mine." With tears coursing her worn cheeks, and sobs breaking her voice, she ran to Barbara and clutched her riding skirt.

"For the love o' mercy, Miss Babbie, turn back! Don' go for to lay you'se own purty head on de death block ob de great war wot's coming! De great war 'tween de Lord's haters an' de Lord's serbants. Oh, Missie Babbie, Missie Babbie, I'se tellin' you now, an' I'se warnin' ye. Turn back. We nigger slaves, we lub ye, Missie Babbie, but 'tis de great war de war ob de Mighty Lord o' hosts, fer to save his chillun, dat's de war wot now's sweepin' up from de Souf to de Norf, an' sweepin' down from de Norf to de Souf! We pore niggers hab don' heard de guns an' de sabres; we hab don' hear de screams ob de dyin' dis day a' comin' in on de winds ob Kansas. De battle am begun, Miss Babbie. De air ob de nation am all filled with de mighty striving; all along de paths ob peace is de war cry shouting. Hear de pore nigger an' for de lub o' heaven don' go ridin' out dere into the face ob de mighty storm."

At this passionate appeal Toffy, whose mule, uninspired by the nervous timidity of Barbara's horse, stood sullenly and immovably, set up a howl of terror, as real as though the wild fancy of his mother's excited imagining appeared in horrid reality before his eyes.

Upon this Barbara laughed aloud.

"Mercy upon us," she cried, reaching back from the saddle and slapping her gloved hand over Toffy's pro-

truding lips, "Mammy's sobs are bad enough, but your yelling turns one's blood cold. Mammy, you go home and mind your work."

"For the love o' mercy, Miss Babbie," sobbed mammy, still clinging imploringly to the riding skirt, "don't ye refuse de pore nigger's prayer! Look ye there, Missy," she cried, more passionately still, pointing upwards with trembling hand, "look ye there! De cloud ob darkness am on de holy star in de bosom ob de cross! It am all don' hidden in de cloud. Oh de Lord in his mercy, de Lord in his mercy! He don' show ye the sign ob danger. Stay at home, Missie Babbie, stay at home, an' don't go for to fly agen' de Lord A'mighty!"

Toffy, who, at his mother's exclamation, rolled his big eyes upward toward the church tower, discovering that a shadow actually hid the symbolic cross and star, plunged his face in the mule's stubbly mane and tried to stifle his terrified howling.

Barbara became impatient, though humourous incidents usually delighted her. She was supremely indifferent to the thousand-and-one imaginative vagaries continually besetting the negro mind, and she hated the hesitating timidity which always seemed the badge of slavery.

"Let go!" she cried with a ring in her voice and a gesture that caused mammy reluctantly to stand back. "Your head's fuller of crazy delusions than a hive of honey."

Mammy dropped on her knees, and, lifting her clinched hands, cried:

"De Lord hear de pore slave woman, de Lord save dis second boy ob hers, driven into de great storm ob war."

Then Barbara, seeing what was really troubling the old mammy, softened, and, turning back, cried:

"Oh, it's for Toffy you're afraid."

But when it came to allowing Theophilus to stay behind, Barbara feeling tenderly towards old mammy's loss of her eldest boy, there developed in Toffy's own little breast a powerful sense of determination. A longing to prove himself worthy of devoted service to his mistress, conquered the host of fears and neither mammy's eager desire nor Barbara's urging could make him return. With a long drawn face, befitting a criminal condemned to walk the plank over a yawning deep, Toffy cried:

"Mammy mine, you go right 'long way home. Toffy's got word from de great Lord A'mighty, word right through to his own heart. And dat word it don' say, 'Choose ye dis day, whom ye will serve.' Wot am de pore bones ob one nigger? Dey is nothing. 'De Lord leadeth,' and Toffy he don' stay by Miss Babbie till de Lord bring him to his end."

The mistiness cleared away as they left the river. The arched sky, tinted creamy sapphire, like an inverted shell, murmured back the droning music of insect, bird, and rustling breeze. Wonderful indeed was the beauty of the huge catalpa blossoms, swinging against the sky, white faces of cherubs smiling out of heaven. Wonderful also the soft lusciousness of the green undergrowth, where banerets of poke-weed stood bravely above the tented

host of may-apples. Barbara's heart beat gaily and she rode fast. The mule would not be distanced and kept his place steadily, so Toffy had little to do, and his dreamy soul built palaces of beauty and peopled worlds invisible.

They lunched merrily under a red bud tree. It was the very spot where Oliver Wentworth hurriedly concealed himself from the party of drunken slave hunters. In the early afternoon they began to suspect they were nearing their destination. Presently they came to a turnout on the prairie trail, leading to a little house on a small hill. Barbara decided to enquire here and rode up to the house. Three or four teams were hitched in the shade, but there was no one in the house and no one to be seen.

"Ther's a barn raisin', or a pole raisin', or a suthin' gwine on," Theophilus suggested.

However, as no one appeared, they turned again to the trail. As they came down the short hill Toffy cried, "Ther' they be."

Out from the bit of timber, stretching back from the trail to the river, came a sombre looking little procession. A gaunt old man, leaning well over on a brown hickory pole, followed by two or three pale women, neatly dressed, hiding their hands in folded resignation before them. Then came a younger woman, with a wild, staring expression. She held herself bolt upright, but by her side two fat, red-faced children clung tenaciously to her skirt. A couple of sinewy looking youths, carrying shotguns, brought up the rear.

There was something so solemn and sad in the expres-

sion of the group as it approached that Barbara refrained from interrupting. The women stared severely, all but the one with the children, and she seemed dazed, unconscious of what was passing about her. Barbara waited for the young men, in the rear of the others, and then asked softly if anyone named William Gibson lived in the neighbourhood.

The young man nearest turned red, pulled at his collar, opened his mouth, shuffled his feet, and then cried out hoarsely:

"Aunt 'Liza, come back here!"

The woman addressed as "Aunt 'Liza" turned and waited, but the young man made impatient gesticulations and she hesitatingly approached Barbara. That, however, did not suit the young fellow with the shotgun, and, swinging over toward her, he craned his lissom neck forward and hoarsely whispered:

"Look out! She don't know nothin'. She's looking for William." He chucked his head sidewise, indicating the woods they had just left.

"Be ye a stranger here?" the woman queried.

"Yes; I am looking for information as to where a man——"

"Hist ye!" And the woman looked nervously over her shoulder. As the rest of the party had, however, moved on towards the house, the children peering back from out the mother's skirts at Barbara, she continued: "We've had a mighty sight of trouble here Miss. The widow, made so sudden, acts like she's a dumb statue. We've

just hed a burying of her man. His name was"—with another look over her shoulder—"his name was William Gibson."

It was Barbara's turn to be surprised.

This, the first place at which she stopped, it did not seem twenty miles from their own house, could it be the same Gibson? And dead?

"Have they, these people, the Gibsons, been out here long?"

"A matter of four or five months, maybe."

"What State were they from?"

"Why, as I've heard, they came the whole way from New England, from Boston."

"And—and—have they been poor?" To Barbara the bleak prairie surroundings suggested hardship and poverty. "Had the husband been sick long?"

"Never sick a day. He was took out of his house, dragged away from his wife and childer, an' murdered!"

The eyes of the two young men with guns were eagerly scanning Barbara's face. But Barbara never wore her heart upon her sleeve. She said nothing, and the woman continued, feeling she must have failed to do justice to the fine opportunity:

"Yes, mum, took right out 'n his own house, afore his woman and his young 'uns, an' murdered! Not for no trouble he never made no one, for there were no more quieter disposed pusson in the territory. But that's wot we've come to; ther's none can call ther' lives ther' own sence these ruffian slave drivers come into the territory."

"Why, you don't mean that——"

"I'll tell ye," drawled one of the men, tossing his gun to the other shoulder. "Gibson was took out and murdered by a gang o' damned Southerners." The speaker eyed Barbara in a very meaning way. His companion hitched his belt and remarked:

"We Kansas white folks has about had 'nough o' Missouri bulldozing. Guess it's our turn naow!"

But Barbara, without another word, slipped lightly from the saddle, passed the halter strap to Toffy, and, gathering up her skirt, went at once to the tiny house.

Two women were seated, fanning themselves, and grumbling at the weather, the hard times, and the unhappy prospect.

But the forlorn mother stood, with hard, unmoved face, staring at a big nail in the wall, where her dead husband's hat still hung.

Barbara stepped up to her and in a voice moved to its purest tones in womanly sympathy said:

"Annie Thomson! I am Barbara Fairfax, Miss Abbie's niece. I have come to look after you, to see what you need. To take you home, if you will!"

The woman's stony face changed. Every line stood out suddenly and then faded. Every feature shrank. Then, with a cry like that of a hurt child, she fell forward into Barbara's outstretched arms, and buried her head upon her shoulder in a great flood of tears.

One of the astonished women by the window unfolded her hands and cried out mournfully:

"For the Lord's sake!"

The other responded with great solemnity:

"Did you ever!"

But Barbara bent tenderly over the trembling figure now shaking and sobbing in her arms.

"You shall come home with me, Annie. Mother will welcome you. You remember mother? You must have seen her at Aunt Abbie's."

But it was too soon for the stricken wife to know anything but her unutterable grief.

"I don't want to live nowhere, Miss Barbara! I don't want to live nowhere!" was all she could answer.

Barbara found her own eyes swimming by this time, but she continued her words of rather incoherent comfort, and finally got Annie to the bed and induced her to lie down.

"It's my conviction," croaked one of the watching women, " that this section be nat'rally onlucky! Ther' was Silas Boone bruk' his leg, lost his bell cow in the cr'ik, an' had his team lifted by Injuns."

"The worst's yet to come," responded in dirge-like tones the other watcher. "That was al'wus my old man's saying. An' I never knowed it to fail, nuther. The worst is al'wus yet to come!"

"Oh," cried Barbara, rapidly untying her riding skirt and removing her gloves, "isn't that nice, to think we are all of us better off now than everybody will be, by and by." And before the wisdom of this remark could receive recognition, Barbara swept down upon the two

old crones and with a radiant smile cried: "You could bring a little water from the spring, could you not, Aunt 'Liza? And you, Mrs.—oh, yes—Mrs. Grubengeizer, I am quite sure you would take these potatoes outside and pare them. See, they were put ready. And I will tend the fire and make a cup of tea." With more radiating smiles, Barbara wheedled and talked, till she had the good women both out of the house. Then she flew to the bedside again. What she said she never knew, but the fountain of tender feeling was opened and she learned the old unwritten language of the comforter.

She led the poor woman's mind, as far as possible, away from the present events and pictured wonderful possibilities in the future. But Mrs. Gibson, a creature of habitual daily toil, had no aptness of imagination, and returned again and again to every little incident of the last two days. It was thus that Barbara learned of the kindly help given by a young stranger, who was the first to discover the tragedy, and who carried word to the neighbours. Even Mrs. Gibson's scanty description was sufficient to assure Barbara that her recent prisoner was evidently intent upon plunging at once into all the dangers of this border war.

When the old women came back again Barbara had not yet made the tea, but she soon did. And after a time Toffy, having fed the horses, came in, and was set to amuse the children. The little ones, at first scared by his black face, soon became intoxicated with joy at the antics he played for them in dumb show on the floor, pretending

to be a sheep dog, in the various tableaux of finding the sheep, rounding them up, and driving off the wolves, till the broken-hearted mother, looking on, was compelled at last to smile through her tear-dimmed eyes. Barbara promised to stay with Mrs. Gibson till the following day, when plans might be made for transporting the family to Star Cross, for the thought of remaining in Kansas was too terrible to the poor widow to be considered even for a moment. And Barbara from the first had quite made up her mind to act as guardian, at least until her aunt could be informed of all the circumstances.

CHAPTER XI

WHILE Barbara was thus led into the circle of tragic events then stirring the most violent passions through the territory of Kansas, other scenes of the most dramatic nature were rapidly transpiring of which she was yet ignorant, but which were destined to draw her more deeply still into the gathering strife.

Before Oliver was awake, after his first night spent in Brown's camp, riders brought in the startling intelligence that the town of Lawrence had been wrecked and burned by a combined force of Missourians and Virginians, with whom were Colonel Mendenhall and his men from Star Cross. That the victorious Southerners, flushed with success, and now being well armed with rifles from the United States armory at Topeka, were sweeping the country along the Wakarusa, swearing to neither rest nor sleep, eat nor drink, until the territory was rid of John Brown. The Captain's reception of this news was characteristic. He said:

"Boys, we must accommodate them. We will march in fifteen minutes."

Every man was elated at the prospect of immediate action. All had such confidence in the intuitive judg-

ment of the leader that they gave no consideration to the odds they were likely to encounter. The youngest of the Browns, a lad of sixteen, was left in the camp, and with him the wounded negro and the family of Ottawa Jones, whom Brown was sheltering since the burning of their home. Then the twenty men, with two wagons, started briskly on a trail due north.

Oliver, in spite of his previous fatigue and wakeful night, felt an extraordinary exhilaration as he rode forward in company with Watson Brown. The air at this early hour was indescribably fresh and fragrant. The sweeping miles of emerald grass, just long enough to sway and lift, were rippled like a sea. Feathery outlines of timber, fringing hidden creeks, broke the too even harmony, and the whole outstretching view seemed the natural setting for a great and prosperous future State.

"What a magnificent country!" Oliver exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Watson, "if the smoke of burning homes did not darken the air, and the cries of women and children, driven from their homes to wander about half starving, were not added to the call of the larks. As it is, hundreds of the best settlers, the most hard working and successful, have moved back again into Illinois and Indiana, rather than submit to the outrages which have the sanction here of 'law and order.'"

"It seems beyond belief that the National Government cannot maintain order."

"Why, the officers of the United States, under direct instructions from Washington, are the very men who

have led these bands of Southern ruffians to destroy our chief city! They are arresting every day the most peaceable and law-abiding citizens on bogus writs, and often with no process of law whatever. Governor Robinson has been seized. Why? Because President Pierce is under oath to those who secured his election to fasten the yoke of slavery upon Kansas at any cost. A Christian who opposes his country's 'divine institution' of degrading his black brother to the level of a beast, is an outlaw, even here in a territory which has been legally declared free."

"Well, how can it end? The people elected Pierce; the people of these United States stand behind his acts."

"All I can say to that is, if the people maintain the curse it will curse them. The nation will go to pieces. But it is father's idea to prevent that by awakening the nation to a clear apprehension of the awful wrong it is now promoting. If he is right, if slavery is damnable, as we think it is, then it must be that truth and right will triumph, by the guidance of the Eternal."

"My friends in the East are, I fear, far from being awakened. They regard my desire to serve in this cause with your father as the nearest approach to mental aberration."

"Father has often been called a fanatic, among many worse epithets. You will, however, have plenty of opportunity of forming your own opinion about that."

"Are we going to see fighting today?"

"It looks like it. But we may have to bluff and draw

off. It depends on where we find them and how strong."

The conversation was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a riderless horse. A cut lariat rope swung from his neck, the stirrup hoods were beating each other beneath the animal's belly.

"It's John's Volunteer!" Watson exclaimed.

John Brown, Jr., was out on scouting duty between Ossawatomie and the Wakarusa, and this appearance of his flying horse was not reassuring.

The old Captain gave a low call and the riderless animal trotted up, thrusting his extended nostrils towards the familiar hand. He was blowing hard and alarm and distress were in his nervous eyes. It must have been a serious calamity which had compelled him to desert his master. Upon further examination a groove across the saddle skirt told of the animal's narrow escape from a bullet. A few miles further on a scout met them with the news that Brown, Jr., was captured, and that a company of over a hundred men had just formed a temporary camp on Black Jack Creek.

A terrible light gleamed in the blue eyes of John Brown as he heard of the capture of his first born. The old lion set his teeth and lashed himself. His cub had been snatched from the lair. But he said not a word! He signalled to Owen and Watson to ride forward with him. In a few moments Watson returned and the little band was ordered to withdraw to a small ravine and wait further orders.

Brown and his son Owen rode on alone to deter-

mine the exact position and strength of the enemy.

The men in the ravine waited fretfully all day, but Brown in the meantime thoroughly mastered the military situation and formed an original and subtle plan of attack. He returned to his impatient followers at nightfall, and at midnight the little party started.

It was an excellent night for the venture. The atmosphere was charged with heavy moisture; every sound seemed dulled. The sky was dark with clouds that scarcely moved, yet enough light sifted through to render the night something less than pitchy black. Not a word was spoken. At the top of the ridge, when only a mile of open prairie lay between them and the thick oak scrub shelter of Black Jack Creek, the party divided into two columns and detoured north and south.

Oliver was in the column of ten men following Owen. After a short ride the men were ordered to dismount and the horses carefully hobbled and roped together in the shelter of a convenient gravel pit. Frederick was detailed to remain as horse guard, and the rest in Indian file moved out into the dull abyss of darkness. As they plodded along a growing light gathered in the southern sky. The cloud bank was thinning and the moon beginning to anticipate the morning. Word was passed for each man to get down on hands and knees and crawl forward, keeping himself as well concealed as possible. A stubby undergrowth of burnt grass stalks made this mode of progress painful and slow. They had only a short distance to cover in this manner, however, before

discovering the carcasses of several buffaloes, where they were to lie concealed until the other column could secure a position to take the enemy in a cross fire from the timber of the upper creek.

It was at this moment that an altogether unforeseen incident fairly staggered the little band. A sudden, tumultuous and confused noise, like the shouting of a hundred hoarse and drunken savages, rent the air, and, sweeping up from the sides of the dark mounds in front, a cloud of buzzards angrily clamoured their dissatisfaction at being disturbed.

Owen rose to his feet, and, calling out, "Run to cover, boys," dashed forward and took his position behind the carcass nearest to the enemy's camp. In two minutes every man was concealed and each adjusted himself to his best firing position, while the gorged birds, flying low, swept down to the timber. It was impossible that the Missourian sentries should not take alarm, and indeed in a few moments the soft thudding of horses' hoofs was heard.

A moment more and Oliver saw horsemen looming out of the dusk. Then rifle shots resounded like breaking glass about his ears.

He began firing.

So rapidly were shots exchanged, so suffocating the yellow smoke, clogging like wool in the damp and darkness, such screams from wounded horses, pierced the echoing report of rifles, rolling back from the ridge above, that had battalions been engaged instead of files, Oliver

would not have been more stunned or lost to consciousness of his surroundings.

He was firing with a rapidity bordering upon frenzy. Active, occupied, and intensely alive, yet his mind became a blank.

He was aroused by a vigourous hand gripping him on the shoulder.

"Quit it, man! Quit it! We can't waste shot in that fashion. Do you hear?" and Owen Brown shook him. "Get up. You've done all right. They're driven in. But the buzzards gave us away, and we shall be outflanked before father can cross fire. Get up. We will fall back on the gravel pit."

The blood setting back in a rush from Oliver's heart, roared in his ears and released the tension of his brain with a thump. He made a gasp for breath, and found his teeth deeply embedded in his compressed lips. He spat blood, wiped his eyes, and struggled to his feet. For the first time he saw that the man on his left had been hit. He was moaning, his legs drawn up, his head jerking backwards.

"That's too bad for Parmley," Owen said, stooping to him. "Can't you?" But the man was unconscious.

"Take my gun, I'll see to him," Oliver cried, and in a moment he had the man up in his arms.

"This way!" Owen cried. "Fall in, men."

When they reached the pit Frederick was dancing about like a maniac, wild with excitement at hearing the

engagement begun before daylight, and unable to guess the reason or the consequences.

Every man had at his saddle a feed bag half filled with cracked corn. These Owen ordered emptied in a careful pile. Then he had them filled with sand and carried out to the ridge on the left of the pit. They were placed in good positions, at intervals of a rod. In a few minutes, as daylight strengthened, the success of this ruse was evident. From a clump of black oaks, away from the creek, puffs of smoke appeared, and the ping of bullets whistled about the feed bags.

"Now, boys, riddle that bush till it's too hot to hold them," cried Owen. At the same moment a line of skirmishers could be distinguished filing out from the lower end of the Missourians' camp in strong force, detouring for the purpose, as Owen had surmised, of making an extended flanking movement. No sooner was this advance discernible than firing began from the opposite end of the camp. Captain Brown had gained his position in the higher ravine and was diverting the enemy's attention to good purpose. The skirmishers were promptly withdrawn, and it was evident that the Missourians felt obliged to fall back upon the defensive.

After a steady fusillade for some half hour between the men in the gravel pit and the Missourians in the clump of oaks, Owen ordered his men to reserve their fire, waiting for any of the party cut off in the bush to attempt to return to their camp. Desultory shots therefore continued for an hour more. Another man was wounded,

but not seriously, before Captain Brown himself came riding up from the southern ridge. His face as Oliver caught sight of him, swinging up toward the sheltered side of the pit, was aflame with passion and excitement, but his marvellous voice, the tones of which thrilled every hearer, was perfectly controlled. Drawing his powerful horse almost upon its haunches he called out: "Owen Brown, be good enough to report to me."

Oliver expected an outburst of anger, for it was evident the father imagined fear had prevented the proper fulfillment of the original plan.

Owen very briefly detailed the facts and the Captain instantly responded:

"I ought to have foreseen the buzzards. I blame myself. Now take fresh instructions."

Then the Captain flung off his horse and climbed to the front of the pit, where, standing at full height, in perfect indifference to the excellent target he afforded the enemy, he took a rapid survey with field glasses of the situation. Turning, he sprang down the steep bank with the agility of a youthful athlete, and asked:

"Is there one of the wounded able to fire?"

"Charlie Keiser is hit, but not seriously."

"Let Keiser be stationed here then, and instructed to fire at sufficient intervals to convince the enemy that the pit is not abandoned. Let three men be detailed to creep in and occupy that oak clump; they may find it already abandoned. And you, Owen, with your other three men, take your horses and ride with me. I can put you in

position where their ammunition, wagons, and horses are within easy range. Now, son Frederick," the Captain cried, turning to his light-hearted, lanky youngest, "I have a grand undertaking for you. Take the best mount, there is John's Volunteer, and here is my sword. As soon as Owen gets to work, you will see his fire from a water draw about half way from here to the ravine. You are to ride out in full view, but well up to the ridge, and with all your lungs keep crying out, 'Come on, boys. They're cut off. We have 'em surrounded. This way. Follow me!' And shouting and waving your sword, you are to ride straight on to Owen, when he will follow you and ride on to join with our party in the ravine. Do you understand?"

Frederick took his father's sword eagerly. Owen offered Oliver the dangerous duty of advancing to the oak bushes, which he readily accepted, and in a few moments the gravel pit was left to the two wounded men and five hobbled horses.

Oliver lost no time in pushing forward with his file of men to the isolated clump of trees. He half believed the men who had so tenaciously held their place there had managed, unperceived, to effect a retreat to the main camp, or else that their ammunition was exhausted. He therefore determined to make a bold run for it. And, calling on his men to follow, he led, at a round pace, holding his rifle at the "present" as he ran. His eyes were strained upon the rough outline of the scrub oaks, with their darker green against the roll of prairie beyond.

Every moment the outlines grew more definite. He was distancing his men, and with his eyes glued on that clump of trees he felt his heart hitting his ribs. At any moment there might flash out a tongue of fire and afterwards a puff of smoke. But the moments passed. He could see the twigs cut by the morning's continuous hail of bullets, their leaves in ribbons. He could see through them a face and a rifle barrel. He stumbled, and as he pitched headlong a blinding light filled his eyes; he heard the report while he was plunging face downward through the white star blossoms and feathery anemones. He was not hurt. The fall saved his life.

He lay there, with the blinding flash still in his eyes and the report rattling in his ears. He knew the grass could not conceal him. The fraction of each instant seemed an eternity. Why did not the expected bullet come?

Lifting his head, he peered forward. There was no face, no rifle barrel visible. He sprang up. As he did so he heard a rustling of branches at the other side of the cluster of trees. With a bound he leaped forward and threw his rifle to the shoulder. A tall figure in handsome uniform was pushing his way out. Oliver fired and he rolled over. Running up to him the man drew a long bowie knife.

Oliver knew him at once. It was Colonel Mendenhall. Seeing at his feet not only his enemy, but the man who had tortured him as a slave, Oliver drew himself to his full height, and in a frenzy of rage, revenge, and loathing cried out:

"You human devil!"

Standing over him, he swung his rifle to the full reach of his long arms, and poised it for the downward blow. Mendenhall was helpless and closed his eyes. But the blast of passion swept out of Oliver's heart as swiftly as it entered. The red flame of rage faded and went out. He lowered his rifle, reminding himself that one cannot teach mercy by being merciless, nor justice by retaliating evil. He therefore contented himself by striking the knife from Mendenhall's now nerveless grasp, discovering as he did so that the Colonel had swooned.

The exigencies of the fight did not allow Oliver to linger with his helpless foe. Skirting the cover, he found his two men cautiously creeping through, and together they opened a sharp fire upon the exposed corner of the enemy's camp. Almost at the same moment the terrific shouting of Frederick Brown, as he careered along the southern slope, came echoing down the ravines, and the Missourians, supposing themselves attacked on all sides, sent out a white handkerchief tied to a ramrod and a file of men to negotiate for a surrender. Brown kept one of the file as hostage, and promptly sent the other back with the demand that the officer in command come out or the battle proceed.

As annihilation of his company seemed the only alternative, Captain Pate, a handsome fellow, with the important bearing of the popular bully, rode out on a fine horse decorated with ribbons. He admitted that others had been in command, but that some were wounded, and some,

with General Dave Atchison, withdrew when the first alarm was given. An unconditional surrender was at length accepted, and Brown, with three men, accompanied Pate to the Missourian camp. No sooner, however, did Captain Pate find the old lion, with only three followers, within his own lines, than the idea of trapping him seemed too tempting to be resisted, and he refused to give the order to his men to lay down their arms. With the mere handful of men on the side of the Free Staters this treachery might have proved successful, but Brown, who was close to Pate, had him on the instant in a vice-like grip, and, putting a revolver to his head, cried: "Give the word or I fire."

Pate yielded, and the whole company in the camp, some seventy men, laid down their arms to less than a third of their own number.

This was a typical example of the daring, sagacity, and energy by which Brown inspired terror in the hearts of the oppressors of the slaves, and saved Kansas from abject submission to their base designs.

After the full terms of surrender were properly arranged and the wounded cared for, a short interval for much needed rest was taken. During the morning a company of Free Staters, who at a few miles' distance had heard the firing, came in, greatly to the relief of Brown's tired men. Before evening the whole party moved over to the securer camp on the Pottawatomie.

CHAPTER XII

THE day after the battle of Black Jack the news of Brown's victory spread far and near. There was great elation among the settlers, who had already suffered at the hands of Missourian raiders, and a general feeling of encouragement, where, before, the oppression of the slave owning party had wrought dismay and constant fear.

At the Gibson settlement Barbara was preparing to ride back again to Star Cross, when a messenger came galloping up from the west, and, after asking Theophilus Moses if Barbara Fairfax, from Missouri, was in the house, presented a letter.

Barbara was startled to read:

"Miss Fairfax.

"I am mortally wounded. I beseech you to give me the opportunity for a parting word. I cannot say more; others may see this. But Brown gives me a soldier's promise that you shall have safe escort.

(Signed) "Jefferson Mendenhall."

Barbara was shocked and distressed. Colonel Mendenhall at the point of death, compelled a recognition which, under other circumstances, he could by no means have

obtained. Her feelings had been strangely altered by recent events, and she was no longer willing to establish any closer tie between the Colonel and herself. Still he was her friend, and the friend of the family. And he was in mortal danger. She could not refuse to see him.

"Toffy!" she cried, "you must return to Star Cross alone. Tell father that Colonel Mendenhall is in the camp of John Brown, and that I have gone there to see him."

"Oh, Miss Babbie!" Toffy exclaimed in awed alarm. But Barbara commanded silence, and immediately mounted her horse, and turned boldly to follow her escort.

The morning was bright. A wide expanse of newly-sprung grass, rolled far before, like a lifting sea. Yet, as Barbara rode on, further and further into the wild territory, approaching the very heart of the conflict, the camp of John Brown, her adventurous spirit was not altogether free from alarm. If these men were the robbers and scoundrels, she had so often heard her father proclaim them, it was extreme rashness to place herself in their power. On the other hand, she had been appropriating facts, and observing incidents, of late, which threatened a compulsory change of belief. Oliver Wentworth, at least, was no scoundrel, and, in the bosom of her dress, she still carried that letter of John Brown's, which, in its lofty spirit, proclaimed him anything but a highwayman, or a rebel!

They were now ascending the rough wooded slopes,

which surrounded the camp, and were presently halted by the sentry.

Barbara was well impressed by the manner both of her escort, and the man on guard. There was no rude jesting, or profanity.

The camp had recently been much enlarged, to accommodate the prisoners. The wagons, and all the sparse comforts, were given to the captives, who were placed in the inner circle. Brown with his own men occupying the outer line.

At the moment of Barbara's arrival, the Captain stood with note-book in hand, drafting an agreement with Captain Pate for an exchange of prisoners. As Barbara's escort called the attention of the Captain to their arrival, Brown advanced, with the dignity which graced his smallest actions. His towering form, chiselled features, and gray eyes, penetrating as the light of day, held Barbara's instant attention. With a woman's quick perception, she detected lines of tenderness, and of sadness, about the corners of his mouth, but the immense chin, and heavy eyebrows, left the sense of sternness predominant.

Barbara hesitated to dismount, till a rare smile, slowly spreading over the Captain's rugged face, she slipped her hand in his, and in a moment was standing in the oddest, and strangest, position of her life.

"Have no fear, my child. We are God's people. We strike, only to break chains, and smite, only to set free!"

Barbara, who, for her own part, had a native dignity,

which generally stood her in good stead in times of stress, returned the Captain's keen look, with a grave gesture.

"I have no need to inquire if I am in the presence of Captain John Brown!"

"I am John Brown," he responded, without noticing the implied flattery. "And you are Miss Fairfax?"

Barbara bowed slightly, the Captain continuing: "One of our prisoners, Miss Fairfax, hearing that you were in the neighbourhood, made an earnest request, to be allowed an interview with you. On his account, I should pay no attention to such a request, but having in camp a young man for whom I have a regard not less than for my own sons, and who claims, I believe, some accidental acquaintance with you, I yielded to his suggestion, that at least a message be sent to you, to discover if there was an equally earnest desire on your part. Your plucky willingness to take this risk, is sufficient indication of your feelings. In deference therefore to you, I allow the prisoner this opportunity."

Barbara felt a wave of resentment sweeping from her heart, and knew she was reddening. So, Oliver Wentworth was here, and taking an active interest in her affairs, plotting indeed, to discover her relations with Colonel Mendenhall.

"You are perfectly entitled to your own methods of attaining any end you choose, Captain Brown," she said, with some coldness. "Allow me, however, to offer the opinion that you have gained no information as to my

wishes. It would be impossible for any woman to refuse the last request of a dying man."

"Was it reported to you that Colonel Mendenhall was mortally wounded?"

"His own letter so informs me."

"Indeed! Well, you need have no alarm for the patient's life; he is very slightly wounded. However, Miss Fairfax, you are at liberty to see him. I have only to add that you accept this opportunity as a courtesy on my part, and, when you leave, you will not convey to our enemies, who may unfortunately be your friends, any communication, or information which would be to our hurt. You understand, as we welcome and are willing to serve you, we expect that you will not betray our confidence."

Barbara bowed, she was still flushing with indignation, at the implication that Mendenhall had deceived her, and that she herself might be considered a spy. When she was brought to the wagon, the most comfortable in camp, in which Oliver had disposed his prisoner, her first impulse was to refuse after all to see him.

But Oliver, who was waiting for her, feeling himself particularly responsible for the Colonel's condition, stepped forward, saying cheerfully:

"Ah, Miss Fairfax, pardon my assumption of an acquaintance. This will restore Colonel Mendenhall more than all the herbs of Mexico."

Without embarrassing her by expecting a reply, Oliver at once lifted the flap of the wagon cover, saying:

"Colonel, Miss Fairfax."

Colonel Mendenhall breathed heavily, and barely opened his magnificent eyes, so that Barbara started toward him in real apprehension. As she leaned above him, his expression brightened, and he whispered softly:

"This is very brave of you. Don't be alarmed! Stoop a little nearer. I didn't expect to meet you next in this confounded pickle, Barbara. I intended to come back to Star Cross with colours flying."

"Oh, how horrible this fighting is!" Barbara cried.

"This is just an unfortunate incident, that is all. Our side will soon settle it. We had a brilliant success at Lawrence. Let me once get out of their clutches, and that's what I want you to do for me, Barbara. Get me out of here, one prisoner more or less, matters little to Brown. Appeal to him for me, put it as a matter of humanity, that I may be allowed to die among friends."

"Oh, don't say that; don't speak of dying. You are not to die; you will recover."

"Hush!" Mendenhall whispered. "It's a good chance on which to escape." And he smiled meaningly. "I shan't be in any danger, if you succeed in getting me away from this trap. But old Brown won't let me off, unless he thinks I'm done for this world. Otherwise, he wants to use me to exchange for one of his own brood of rebel sons."

"But he knows you are not really dangerously hurt now."

"He knows it, you say!"

"Yes, I'm sorry you attempted a subterfuge; he will distrust you now. You deceived me, and,—and I confess, it was not thoughtful of you to so frighten me, but you could not deceive the Captain. He told me with particular emphasis, which I did not understand then, that you were very slightly wounded."

"The Saints desert him! I was afraid he suspected my ruse. Still, will you not try him? Your powers, Barbara, are not the sort any man can resist. Go to the old Herod, and wheedle him into granting you this favour."

Barbara hesitated. She wished to do all she fairly might for the Colonel, as a fellow Southerner, but she felt, every minute, less desire to identify herself with his cause, or his personal interests. The atmosphere of this Kansas camp of Free-Soldiers, affected her deeply. Everything bore the impress of the old Puritan Captain, there was no disorder, no coarse language, no smoking. Everything was cleanly, dignified and in order. The startling contrast to the warlike demonstrations made in Star Cross, with all the accompanying rowdyism, drinking, swearing and brutality, appealed at once to Barbara with striking practical effect. Looking round, she saw Oliver Wentworth at a becoming distance, evidently observing her with interest, yet with the suggestion of a smile upon his lips, which sent a thrill of exasperation through Barbara's nerves.

"Colonel Mendenhall, you should not ask me to do that!" she said swiftly. "I would die, rather than ac-

cept obligations from these men. But it would be only useless to attempt it. As you say, the Captain sees in you as a prisoner the value of the life of his son. Would he throw that away to gratify me? I could not ask him. No doubt you will be very easily exchanged, and in the meantime,—why, you are not in a dungeon! You are not starving! You are not in chains! You are not, oh, it is horrible to think of; tortured, as—as, your prisoner was."

"What do you mean? I am a gentleman and an officer. These dogs, at least, have sense enough to respect that. But, Barbara, if you won't help me in one way, at least do this. Stoop nearer again; these frontiersmen can hear a breath if it goes their way. Take these papers, get them to Colonel Stringfellow, or Colonel Atchison, both of whom must now be at Independence or Westport; you can send to Clinton and telegraph from there, to have them meet your messenger on the Harrisonville road."

Barbara drew slightly back.

"I am sorry," she said sincerely. "I wish to be of some help to you. I came, thinking you were in immediate, even mortal danger. But I was admitted only as a friend, pledged to carry no information to,—to the enemies of this camp, of Captain Brown."

The Colonel raised himself, with a good deal of vigour, forgetting his simulated weakness, but immediately restrained himself, and only showed his irritation by exclaiming: "Have you become a Free State sympathiser?

Do you want to see the South driven out of Kansas, and the cursed Yankees sweeping the country with their vile Liberation principles?"

"I believe in justice, Colonel Mendenhall, and honour, and, if I am a Southerner, I believe in treating even slaves with mercy and all men with charity."

Mendenhall stared. Under other circumstances he would have expressed savagely his sentiments, but as it was, he only muttered: "You are quoting from the 'Boston Liberator;' we won't discuss that cause. But I can't believe you will refuse to carry out a message from me to my friends! There is no responsibility with you. You need know nothing of the contents!"

"Oh, Colonel Mendenhall, say no more. It is quite impossible for me to be your messenger."

"What, Barbara, are you going to leave me, without the slightest help? You won't lift a finger to save me? You won't so much as take with you a word by which I might at once regain my freedom? Is this your justice, and charity! Well, so be it! What do I care! If you, Barbara, are indifferent, my life becomes a matter not worth consideration even to myself."

Barbara's cheeks darkened with deep blushes. She felt her whole position was purposely misconstrued. She would at the outset have checked his freedom of speech to her, had she not been deceived, in thinking he was actually at the point of death, and now he had gone on compelling her to accept a familiarity that was unjustifiable and cruel.

"No consideration upon that point is demanded, Colonel," she replied with a restrained accent that might have been thought sarcastic. "It is clear that you are well cared for. My coming was a mistake. And I must hasten to return and allay the anxiety my further absence will surely give them at home."

"Barbara! Barbara!" he cried, with a tremor of genuine passion, but she was turning away. He leaned quickly forward, and caught her arm. She would have torn away from him, had she not felt that other eyes, not far away, were watching her. As she yielded, and to prevent observation, stooped within the wagon cover, Colonel Mendenhall recovered himself sufficiently to avoid the rash act which would have forfeited forever all chance of winning Barbara's esteem, and instead, he released her, saying, with an exquisite smile, "You are the conqueror, Miss Fairfax, as you always deserve to be. Pardon my blundering passion. I can never sufficiently repay you for, for—this to me, hazardous visit."

For a moment Barbara was impressed by the evident sincerity of his words, and her escape from a dreaded scene, moved her to regard the Colonel with better feeling.

"I trust a very short time will find you restored to strength, and at liberty to return from these unpleasant scenes, to your own Virginian home."

He looked at her, as though he thought in that suggestion was still something other than good will. But he only said very calmly:

"I wrote a few words to my old mother in Richmond, but I suppose she must continue to think of me without hearing from me."

"Oh," said Barbara, "I could at least take that."

Mendenhall turned partly away, saying as he did so: "Why, if you would! It is all ready, though unsealed. I have no wax, nor wafer. But if, for the old mother's sake, you would see that this goes to her! Ah, thank you;" as Barbara placed the envelope and its contents in the bosom of her dress. At the same time, bidding the Colonel goodbye, she smiled quite ostentatiously, well aware that Oliver Wentworth was a distant observer, and waved her hand gracefully to the wounded Colonel.

Barbara would have made all possible speed to return to the shelter of the ransacked shanty of the Gibsons, feeling in touch there with something more suggestive of home and Star Cross, than this soldiers' camp. But as she returned from the inner line of wagons, to the more open circle of surrounding rifle pits, a sentry, politely saluting, requested her attendance upon the Captain at lunch. Barbara endeavoured to decline, but was met by the information that her horse had just been given feed, and the Captain desired that Miss Fairfax would at least rest and share their soldier's meal.

Under a low hickory tree, a rough walnut slab rested upon crossed bayonets. This was the camp mess table. Men who were not on duty, quickly gathered round. Then the Captain appeared and immediately uncovered.

"God reigns! To Him be the glory forever!" Through

the quiet woodland, the simple words rang with strange solemnity. The Captain was courteous, but silent. The bread, dried fish, and cold water, were not a stimulating repast. The ascetic look on the stern faces about her, pricked into Barbara's heart, as though she had in some way a personal responsibility for it. "To endure hardness"; "as in bonds with them that suffer." It was indeed no illusion.

After the brief meal, at the moment of her departure, Barbara intimated, timidly, for there was an air about Captain Brown which dissipated all her usual assertiveness, that it did not seem a very luxurious life in the Free State camp.

Brown's reply was brief:

"We are willing to bear more than this, for the sake of the crushed millions who have no comforter."

Barbara was silent, the Captain offering to help her mount, but Oliver was already waiting at her horse's side. "Mr. Wentworth is responsible, Miss Fairfax, for your safe conduct, until you find yourself with friends."

Barbara had no choice, and, so accompanied, left the camp. As they passed into the trail, the Captain called Oliver back, and, in a low voice, said:

"Wentworth, that girl has papers from Mendenhall which must not be delivered. Can you promise to obtain them? Or must I humiliate her, by arresting, and compelling her to give them up here?"

Contending emotions, for a moment moved rapidly through Oliver's mind, but he replied:

"You know she has them?"

"I know she has."

"I will bring them back, or—or compel her return."

"I can trust you, that they shall not be delivered?"

"You can."

Oliver slung back his rifle, saluted, put the spur to his active mule, and overtook his charge.

CHAPTER XIII

BARBARA no sooner found herself clear of the camp, than her spirits rose buoyantly, in natural reaction from a restraint so unusual.

"Can't you suggest some entirely ridiculous thing that I could do at once?" she asked, turning in the saddle and addressing Oliver.

At the moment, Oliver was berating himself for the folly of attempting to lessen the inevitable consequences of Miss Fairfax's treacherous conduct. He was wishing himself at the bottom of the Mississippi, before he had interfered in her behalf. Why, by everything sensible, had he not allowed Brown to detain her in the camp, and take what means he chose, to prevent the delivery of Mendenhall's dispatches. Barbara's sudden enquiry fell upon his angry meditations, like oil upon glowing embers. He flushed, at which she smiled. Then he called out, impetuously and with desperation:

"You might confess yourself a spy!"

Barbara's astonishment was genuine. For a full moment she stared in amazement. Then suddenly trilling delighted peals of laughter, she cried:

"What a relief to be understood! It's like being at home again. I confess, Mr. Wentworth. I confess at

once. Only I insist that it shall not lead to my return to camp. That is the one thing I most desire to avoid."

She is more afraid of the humiliation than ashamed of the crime, thought Oliver, but he only said:

"As you wish. There need be no return to camp; my orders cover only the dispatches you carry. Deliver them to me, and you are at liberty."

Again Barbara glanced at his serious and averted face. Then cried, with well assumed intensity:

"First, hear my story. It is cruel to condemn a woman unheard. Ah, sir, do not impute to me motives degrading and base, without listening to the terrible temptation which beset my young and innocent life!"

In spite of the inexplicable charm of the girl, which Oliver had already felt so alluring, he concluded that she was undoubtedly frivolous, as she was proud and disdainful, true child of the immoral slave-holding South.

"I fear you think me fitly associated with this desperate errand," Barbara continued. "I see you do. But oh, if you could but realise the remorseless tide of events, which has swept me into this whirlpool of suspicion, danger, and disgrace!"

"This is most unnecessary," Oliver interrupted.

"Sir, you cannot ask even so unhappy a creature as myself, to admit her guilt, without at least the justification warranted by the simple facts!"

It suddenly occurred to Oliver, that this assumed manner was a stratagem to occupy the time, until at a safe distance from the camp, the girl might boldly attempt an

escape, trusting to the superior swiftness of her horse. He felt therefore that he must compel her submission without further delay.

"It is a pity to make this business more painful than it need be for either of us. Why prolong it? Even though it wounds your vanity, let me admit that I have no desire to hear your confession. Spare yourself that humiliation, and simply give up the papers you carry. I ask for nothing more."

"Oh, you men! How you do delight in prosaic facts! You would blot all the romance from the book of life. But, sir, I insist upon giving a full account of all my sorrowful fortunes, or,—or, I won't stir another foot."

Barbara displayed such evident determination, and looked so bewitching, that Oliver for the moment hesitated.

"However," Barbara continued, "my narrative would be more easily told were we to dismount."

There was a level dell, to the left of the trail, where a little rivulet came bubbling out from the rough ledge above. The sun blazed upon the upper slopes, but within, where the nut trees shouldered above the banks, there was cool shadow.

"And here is just the place," Barbara cried, turning her horse from the road, and leaping lightly from the saddle before Oliver, who followed, could proffer assistance. And then to his further astonishment, catching up the train of her riding skirt, she pirouetted along

the bank of the tiny stream, carolling gaily the words of the old negro dance song:

"Juba heah, an' juba dah!
An' juba, juba, e'bry whar!
Juba dis, an' juba dat,
An' juba roun' de kettle ob fat!"

Laughing, and panting, the staccato trills of the melody still bubbling upon her lips, she flung herself down upon the grassy bank. A group of locust trees, with slim trunks closely intertwined, hung above. Scattered bunches of pink and white blossom, hardly blown, gave forth a delicate suggestion of their summer fragrance. Thin lines of purple dragon flies, darted up and down the stream.

As Oliver approached, first taking care to hitch the horses securely, Barbara sat up, and made a wry face, with a little shiver of disgust.

"Oh, that dreadful camp! It gives one the dismals to think of it. With its shadows, and gloom, its bare poverty, and its pitiless sentries! How can you keep cheerful there? But you don't, do you; it shows in your face!"

"Military camps are hardly summer resorts," Oliver replied. "Nor does one take up arms, in behalf of an oppressed people, with the expectation of enjoying a butterfly existence."

"You speak very wisely, sir. How becoming it is to preserve one's gravity, whether in the midst of war's alarms or here, in nature's peaceful groves!"

Oliver showed no signs of relaxing.

"Jest, if you will," he cried impatiently. "To me the circumstances are sufficiently unpleasant, to warrant some sobriety!"

"Well, upon my word, Mr. Wentworth," Barbara retorted, bridling under his persistent indifference. "You carry your part to the verge of impertinence."

Oliver folded his arms and remained standing.

"You carry yours to perfection," he replied. "Pray proceed."

"As you will," she said, with a kindlier glance, "I am not I suppose as persistent as you. That is a feminine quality, to be changeable. I enjoy a little comedy, but I cannot keep up an imaginary character forever, you know."

"For heaven's sake, Miss Fairfax," Oliver cried, not in the least perceiving her meaning, "let me beseech you to desist from this play of words, this frivolous, and useless delay."

"Oh, if you really insist! Then listen, sir, listen to the most distressful circumstances, which led me to the perfidious crime, in which you have now detected me. If you can hear without pity, without compassion, you must be less than human. From my earliest youth I was unusually beautiful—" Here Barbara took a cautious upward look, but Oliver avoided her eyes. "Nay, be seated," she cried; "this story requires downward glances, I regret it, but it is impossible to recite it with upturned eyes."

Oliver reluctantly seated himself at her feet.

"As I was saying, I was young and beautiful."

"Let that pass," Oliver grumbled.

"You little apprehend, sir, with what eagerness I would do so, did the story admit it. But, alas, those very qualities, as with so many of my sex, were the cause of my undoing."

"Enough, enough! Come to the point. To the circumstance, the influence, whatever it was, which led to this willingness on your part to play the spy."

For answer, Barbara flung back her head, and fell into genuine laughter.

"Oh, dear!" she cried at last, still shaking with merriment. "I give up! It is too absurd! I cannot think of another thing; but I am sure I was young, and beautiful!"

Looking at her happy face, lit with the light of fun, her splendid eyes, radiant beneath the waving coils of dark clustering hair, Oliver began to perceive the stupidity of his blunder. How was it possible to associate intentional treachery, and the character of a spy, with such a nature! Brown was misinformed, that was all. And for himself, he had been a brute and an ass, or such a suspicion could never have held an instant.

Barbara, noting the yielding of Oliver's severe expression, supposed that he too, was ready to abandon their amusing by-play, and assume his natural character.

"Mr. Wentworth," she cried, "do you realise that you are a consummate actor? I don't see how you could keep up the part so well! Why, you were so stern!"

But Oliver, willing now to treat the whole affair as a by-gone incident, did not at all desire to dwell upon his own sorry part in it, and adroitly turned the conversation, by crying gaily, as he now looked up at her fearlessly:

"Do you know that your hair is stuck all over with wild roses?"

She had forgotten how the Gibson children had amused themselves that morning.

"No!" she cried, putting up her hands, and pulling out the delicately fragrant flowers. "Is it possible then, that I have been parading the enemy's camp, in the costume of a mad Ophelia!"

"Don't say the enemy's camp!" he interrupted quickly. "You,—I—." Her beauty was beginning to affect him. Since he had dismissed from his heart the abominable suspicions previously lodged there, he allowed himself to look upon her without restraint, and, as a result, he experienced a dizzying intoxication.

Barbara came to his help, by replying tartly:

"Of course we are enemies. We can't help that, as long as you are on one side, and I am on the other." This was irresistible logic, but it was evidently not pleasing to Oliver, who showed it in his face.

"Still," continued Barbara, somewhat coyly, "even if we are obliged to be enemies, that need not prevent our becoming friends, need it?"

Here was something better than logic, and Oliver eagerly grasped it.

"Why, of course not. That is what I meant to say."

This amicable understanding, happily brought about, the conversation drifted pleasantly round the one engrossing theme. It was easy for the girl, with her ready wit, and compelling beauty, to lead him as she would. She sounded and measured him. She saw the rigid outlines of his Puritan integrity, discovered the gleams of ideal hope, and lofty purpose, in the clear sky of his youthful vision, found where he was sensitive to praise or blame, and how he could be drawn as a badger furious from his deepest self-conscious retreat, or quieted and soothed into purring docility again, by dexterous touches of voice and eye. On his part, she foiled him. He deliberately, even bluntly, questioned her, only, however, to be completely baffled. She was simple, yet adroit. Brilliant, yet moody. First joyous, then sad. Witty and companionable, then tart and defiant! Everything in a moment, but nothing long. She held him, and captivated him, and he was conscious of it. Yet she more completely bewildered and eluded him. He knew not yet, as he had not known in that first meeting in the Star Cross block house, how much of her heart was touched with human tenderness, how much thrilled with Southern passions. Still he gazed at her in confused bondage, and delighted in his uncertainty.

It was Barbara, who had to remind him that they might be expecting, and even demanding his presence at the camp. For her own part, she declared laughingly, that

she must hasten to communicate the important results of her spying, to the Southern officers.

Oliver desired, before they resumed their journey, that he should have the assurance of Miss Fairfax, that she entirely forgave him for his unworthy, and unjust suspicions.

"Oh," Barbara laughed, "anything is fair in make-believe. But you certainly did carry the assumption to great lengths. Positively, you almost compelled me to think you were in earnest, more than once."

"In earnest, Miss Fairfax?"

"Yes, really. Your assumption of the part of accuser, just to please my whim for something thoroughly ridiculous, was so true to life, and so insistent, that you almost frightened me."

"It was no assumption, it was brutality, it was incredible meanness. Can you forgive me?"

"Pooh! It was well done."

"Well done? Alas, it was ill meant. Let us forget it. Yet it mystifies me how the old Captain, who is the most sagacious man I ever knew, should have asserted so positively, that Colonel Mendenhall was seen to give you a letter, which you immediately concealed."

Barbara was standing with hand upon the saddle flap. Oliver had unhitched, and turned the horses, and she was about to mount.

"Well, what of that?" she cried.

Oliver turned white. His hand closed slowly upon the bridle of her horse.

"What of that?" he repeated after her, amazed and mystified. "What of that? You don't, you are not serious?"

For a moment Barbara stood astonished in her turn. Then angrily, she exclaimed:

"The,—you,—then you really did suspect me! You believed the lies of your Captain. You thought me a spy!"

"I beseech you," cried Oliver, "tell me that you took nothing from Mendenhall, that the Captain was mistaken!"

"I shall tell you nothing of the kind."

"Then you admit it?"

"I admit that you are insolent, and that I detest you."

But even as she spoke, it flashed through Barbara's mind, how Mendenhall at first tried to persuade her to carry dispatches, how he suddenly changed his tone and method. What if he had deceived her? If the letter to his mother was after all, a mere expedient for getting information to his army friends? What if he had thus made her unknowingly, that which she had so unblushingly denied? What if she were in fact, the bearer of secret messages, a deceiver, a spy? She paled, with a sudden sense, that the comedy might yet become a tragedy.

Oliver watched her changing colour, and standing rigidly before her, demanded:

"Give it to me!"

The sternness of his tone brought back her ebbing pride. She faced him with equal determination.

"Pray, sir, beware how you insult me! So far I have supposed you were facetious."

"Would to God I were!"

"Sir!"

"This is a matter of life or death. I must have that dispatch."

"You shall not have it."

"Then I shall take it by force."

Barbara crimsoned with indignation. Yet even in the moment of hating the man's tyranny, she was impressed by the vivid glow of his masterful eyes, the poise of his erect figure. Her feminine sense of powerlessness before brute strength, prompted her to subtlety. She conceived a plan, which she at once began to put into execution.

"I am not accustomed to being made afraid," she said very calmly. "And really, I see no reason, Mr. Wentworth, for us to quarrel. Even if you so far forget yourself as to deliberately threaten me. This I am willing to admit, that I believe you will regret your behaviour when you understand, how—" and here Barbara very becomingly let her eyes droop softly,—"when you realise how unkindly you have construed my actions."

It was impossible for Oliver to remain angry before this gentle appeal. Yet he was far from satisfied as to its genuineness. With no show of emotion, he simply repeated his demand, that the dispatch be given up.

Then Barbara slowly turned aside, and with great deliberation, drew a letter from the bosom of her dress. She held it out to him, as demurely as though it were a maiden love token, to be thus secretly exchanged.

Eagerly, even roughly, he caught it from her hand, and thrust it under his belt. Then without a word, he held her stirrup, signifying his desire that she should mount.

She yielded without a murmur.

"Ride forward," he said, drily. "My instructions are to see you safely among friends."

There was a perceptible accent upon the final word.

Barbara obeyed.

They left the fringe of timber, and the trail descended into the long flat prairie, through which the Pottawattomie sluggishly curled. Coming out of the shade, the intense light seemed tangible. The sky had no tinge of its softer blue; it was like a burnished shield and the flattened prairie seemed crushed beneath its golden splendour. Invisible insects filled the air with ceaseless sound. The earth sizzled. There was neither house, nor human presence visible. Barbara pulled her big brimmed hat well over her face, and rode slowly, and silently, for some distance. Oliver did not overtake her, and she began to be surprised.

Presently she pulled off her glove, and let it fall. Then she stopped her horse and waited.

Oliver had seen the glove fall. He dismounted, picked it up, and presented it to her, without a word.

"Are you—" she began to ask, but seemed to feel some hesitation—"are you displeased with me about, about that letter?"

"I don't care to say what I feel."

"I think you might at least revoke your, your other condemnation of me. Because this is not as bad as the other, you know!"

Oliver looked at her blankly mystified.

"Well, at least, I hope you don't think it is!" There was certainly something very like a compromising twinkle in the shaded violet of Barbara's eyes.

But as Oliver made no response, she asked:

"Have you read the—the letter?"

"Certainly not."

"Oh, but that is foolish of you, very foolish."

"I shall place the papers in the hands of Captain Brown. I have no interest in their contents. My instructions were only to bring the dispatch back to camp."

"Oh, you insist on suspecting me."

"Suspecting you! Gracious heaven, have you not compelled me against every inclination, not only to suspect, but to be convinced?"

"Indeed, I have not. Read the letter."

But Oliver turned away and remounted. Barbara was tempted to let him go, but instead, she wheeled her horse across the trail, and called out:

"You are obstinate. And, don't you know, you are altogether mistaken. I never received a dispatch from Colonel Mendenhall. This letter belongs neither to him

nor to me; it belongs to you! There! Now do you understand?"

Of course Oliver did not. If anything more inexplicable or confusing could occur, it would not have left him more perplexed.

However, he pulled forth the letter from his belt, and as he did so Barbara touched up her horse, and left him to its perusal.

Instead of details of the strength of the camp, plans, sketches, or instructions; instead of a communication advising an immediate attack, or directing a co-operating movement with the prisoners, the document was addressed to himself, and began:

Dear Friend: I shall be very glad if you join our cause. But I would flatter no man into such a measure, if I could do it ever so easily. I expect nothing but hardship, etc.

This was the letter stolen from him with maps and other documents, before he was thrown into the block house at Star Cross. The other letters, and the money, had been returned to him. But this was worthless to any one. But Barbara Fairfax had cared for it.

Looking up, he saw that Barbara, who had put her horse to a good pace, was pausing at the edge of the sandy bank, down which the trail ran into the low bottom land, before crossing the stream. He urged his mule forward, but as he did so, he heard a startled cry. Barbara had just disappeared over the bank. In another moment

her horse, riderless, came leaping up again, a cloud of yellow dust enveloping him. The lines were over his head, and putting his foot through them, he pitched over, and rolled kicking on the ground. Oliver's mule at the same moment, quivered and reared, and in spite of spur and blows, became unmanageable with fright. While the wretched brute was wheeling and leaping under Oliver's furious efforts to control him, the cause of the disaster was disclosed, by the appearance through the dust, of a gaunt buffalo bull, whose grizzled front with tattered mane sweeping to the ground, scarred by many battles, was hideous enough. He was followed by a cow and two tottering calves; all four smeared with mud, from their wallowing, presented a revolting spectacle. The fallen horse, as the buffaloes passed at a swinging lope, made a desperate effort to rise, snapped the bridle and galloped madly away. Then the mule struck after him with the bit in his teeth, till Oliver in desperation brought him to the ground by a blow between the ears with his rifle stock. Scrambling to his feet, having been thrown some distance over the mule's head, Oliver ran at his best speed, to the river bank. For a moment he was dumbfounded, for down the short descent there was no sign of Barbara. He ran on with a dazed sense of stupid wonder, till he caught sight of her skirt in the tangle of Chickasaw plum bushes. The angry bull had tossed her aside, as he charged up the bank.

Instantly Oliver broke through the prickly boughs, white with their million blossoms, and found Barbara

insensible. Lifting her clear of the thorns, he struggled out of the thicket, and laid her tenderly on the tufted swamp grass. She seemed lifeless. In his fear and haste, tugging at the unknown fastenings at her throat, he tore open the front of her gown, and, as he did so, a letter slipped out and fell at his feet.

He stooped to dash water in her face. He was so intent that three figures, stealthily creeping upon him from the higher ground, were unobserved. It was only as Barbara drew a delicious breath, and opened wide her surprised eyes, that he felt hands pinioning him from behind, a noose catching at his throat, and as though to foreclose all resistance, received a terrific blow at the back of the head.

Barbara did not swoon again. Instead she sat bolt upright, glaring upon the three ruffians, whose faces seemed strangely familiar.

"Thank the Lord, Miss Babbie, you've come to! Brace up, Miss, brace up! Don't ye know the sight of us, Miss? We're all from St. Clair County; we knows ye well enough. Ye're Parson Fairfax's daughter, of Star Cross, an' the parson's as true a man as lives, he is, an' as straight for the rights of the South, as Dave Atchison himself."

Barbara now recognised the men as having been among Mendenhall's raiders. At the same moment she saw Oliver's body flung out by the edge of the river, motionless. With a start of horror, she cried out:

"Is he dead? Have you killed him?"

"We ain't decided whether to pitch him in the river, or pack him back to camp. But ye needn't mind him, he won't harm ye no more."

The Missourians had already recognised Oliver as the abolitionist prisoner, left in the block house at Star Cross. They supposed him to have been attacking Miss Fairfax, and nothing would convince them that the "d—d abolitionist" could be looked at in any other light than that of a deadly enemy. They refrained, however, from summarily disposing of him, the leader of the raiders promising that he should be returned to Star Cross, to await such punishment as his superior officers might decide to inflict. Meanwhile one of the men picked up the letter that had fallen from Barbara's dress. In a moment more, they were wild with excitement over its contents. Brief details of the small number of fighting men in Brown's army, rough plans of the camp, a drafted scheme for approach and attack, which would insure an easy victory, promise of co-operation on the part of the Missourians already prisoners in camp. Atchison, Stringfellow or Donaldson, were named as those to whom these facts should be immediately communicated.

Barbara's heart beat with throbbing passion, as she realised how easily she had become the tool of Mendenhall's audacious cunning.

The three men were anxious to hasten to camp with their news. In spite of their apparent friendliness, Barbara found herself helplessly at their mercy, and both she and Oliver, who was now conscious, but securely

bound, were put upon horses, and hurried across a wild and treacherous swamp land, to a strip of projecting timber. Here, was a well concealed settlement of Shawnee Indians, to whose safe keeping the raiders committed their captives.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN the evening of the next day, Barbara sat at the entrance of the small wigwam, in the diminutive village, where, treated with the utmost respect, and the full measure of Indian hospitality, she was nevertheless a close prisoner.

Opposite, at the door of his own lodge, sat "Green Turtle," dozing upon a magnificent white buffalo skin. He wore an embroidered antelope cape, with a heavy chain of bear's teeth round his neck, and great tufts of immense eagle's feathers, strung from his long hair. His puffed cheeks were smeared with white clay, in sign of perpetual mourning, for the loss of their lands, confiscated by the white aggressors through a treaty the Indians were compelled to accept, or perish. Since he had been denied the rights of his fathers, the old chief had sunk into a stupor of idleness.

Barbara had already exhausted herself, in efforts to compel the chief to send her home. She had implored, bribed, and threatened, but equally in vain. The Missourians had assured the old Indian, that within twenty-four hours, Colonel Mendenhall, with his victorious men, would be at the settlement, and if he did not find the two captives, would burn the village to the ground. Barbara

had then vainly striven to discover what fate had befallen Oliver, but to all her enquiries, commands and petitions, the torpid, tobacco-stained chieftain grunted, grinned, shook his head, and finally ordered the squaws to hustle her back to her own quarters.

Here, dejected, mortified, and distressed, Barbara inwardly raged. Her will was thwarted, her pride offended, and she fiercely resented the irresistible restraint under which, for the first time in her life, she now found herself.

The setting sun filled the bed of the muddy river with a resplendent glow, transfiguring the colourless sand into golden crimson and orange saffron. Across the moist swamp land the stiff poke weed blossoms looked like purple flames above a sea of fire. Down the wide lane of the village street the changing light, playing upon the copper coloured children, the yellow dogs, the shaggy horses, the skin covered tepees, emblazoned all the dirt and patchwork with unearthly beauty. Ragged hides appeared splendid as the tapestries of an age of gold, while the glass earrings and metal bracelets against the dried and dusky skins of the crouching squaws gleamed and glittered like priceless jewels.

But of all this Barbara observed nothing. Her mind was filled with indignation against Colonel Mendenhall, but for whose deceit and shameful treachery she would have comfortably returned to Star Cross and known nothing of Brown's camp, or of those Missourian ruffians, or of this outrageous and abominable imprison-

ment. While deeper in her heart than indignation stirred a remorseful sense that probably an irreparable injury had been inflicted upon the cause of "those who have no helper." If only she had refused to carry Mendenhall's letter, if she had at least kept it from falling into other hands! Then the utter doubt as to what had befallen Oliver Wentworth weighed upon her soul.

As she sat thus, with dejected countenance, leaning her chin upon her hands, she was suddenly attracted by a pair of bead-like eyes fixed upon her with an expression of intense covetousness. The eyes were those of no less a personage than the favourite squaw of the big chief, Green Turtle. She was elaborately dressed in a tunic of deer skin, ornamented with beads in fantastic figures. The squaw, who was quite young, was of unusual beauty, her complexion heightened by spots of vermilion dye on each cheek. At first Barbara shrank in some dread, but the next moment the squaw opened her lips, disclosing two magnificent rows of pearly teeth, and murmured in fluty tones, "How! How!" Then she glided with the motion of a creeping fox close to Barbara's side, till she could gaze with the utmost absorption upon a ring, which in the now fading light still gleamed with some brilliance on Barbara's finger.

It suddenly suggested itself to Barbara's mind that with this she might secure the co-operation of a valuable helper. She had already vainly tried to gain some information from the older squaws, who had only blinked at her with their snake-like eyes and appeared utterly

incapable of understanding. Possibly cupidity quickened the faculties of this younger creature. At all events, no sooner did Barbara show by signs that under certain conditions the ring might become the property of the favourite, than the squaw's face lit up with intelligence. She "How! Howed!" with great satisfaction. And when Barbara whispered emphatically several times, "Get me away! Escape! My own people!" she responded, between mysterious gutturals, "So—take Miss to white mans—so!" Then she glided away into the gathering darkness, in a few moments reappearing carrying a dark cloth, beautifully fringed, in which she carefully enveloped Barbara's head and almost her whole person. Then, elated with gratitude to this befriending young squaw, and glad indeed to part with the ring in exchange for an escape from this unbearable imprisonment, Barbara, with a rope loosely about her neck, marched out, as though to her execution.

Passing in and out of the litter of poles, kettles, ropes, bundles of half dried hides, and innumerable sleeping dogs, Barbara blindly followed where the squaw deftly led.

So they went to the outskirts of the village. Here was a guard house, or tent of rough poles, loosely covered with much worn hides. Before it a smouldering fire burnt low and weirdly outlined half a dozen lean, almost naked, warriors, with their shields behind them, who sat in a ring smoking "shong-sasha."

The young squaw, with the air of one in authority,

went boldly toward the group and, gabbling some words in a harsh voice to the nearest figure, she thrust into his hand the trail rope, the other end of which was noosed about Barbara's neck. Before Barbara knew what was taking place the Indian had risen to his feet and pulled her roughly into the tent. He tied the rope to the door pole and went out again to rejoin his companions and take his turn at the pipe.

For a moment Barbara's only impulse was to scream. She was utterly in the power of these inhuman creatures, and what, after all, would be more natural than that the young squaw should take the quickest means to rid herself of the evidence of ownership in the coveted ring? The tent within was dark, but as Barbara pushed the cloth from her face she plainly heard the straining of a rope and a suppressed groan.

Commanding her trembling voice she said softly:

"Are other prisoners here?"

"In God's name," came a quick response, "Miss Fairfax!" Barbara could not speak. Oliver was here! She had been so torn with fear as to what had become of him.

"Oh! Oh!" she sobbed, and buried her face in her hands. The frail tent shook suddenly and words of violent significance escaped from Oliver's corner.

Barbara was smitten with a hundred emotions at once. Through her sobs she had a ludicrous sense of smiling. She was passionately indignant; she was also very completely bewildered. Whether the young squaw had played her false, or whether this was only a move in the

plan of escape, she could not guess. She was certainly glad in her heart to have discovered Oliver Wentworth alive and unharmed. But she was mortified in knowing that her own act had betrayed his leader, and yet determined that she should never confess to him the dishonour of that second letter.

Directing her attention, however, to the immediate situation, in a whispered colloquy she discovered that Oliver was pinioned and lashed so closely to a tent pole as to be enduring torture. Meanwhile Barbara found herself able, with little difficulty, to throw off the noose about her own neck. "I am coming over to you," she whispered, and passed noiselessly to the rear of the tent, feeling her way in the darkness along the rough hide walls. Suddenly her hand came against his face, her soft fingers over his mouth.

She started back quickly, but, recovering herself, cried, "Where are those knots?"

"Don't try," he murmured, with well feigned resignation. "Your fingers are so—so soft!"

"And useless," she added fiercely.

The ropes felt like iron, the knots like flint.

Then Barbara bent her head and put her teeth to them. The first easing of the ropes brought relief to Oliver's strained arms, and an involuntary sigh of satisfaction escaped him.

"I'm so glad I've done it," Barbara whispered.

Then he began to release himself entirely from the ropes, but Barbara said:

"I'm not sure if I ought to let you go altogether."

"Don't!" he cried, and put his arms about her.

A sudden breeze, drawing in under the flap of the doorway, blew across a heap of still smouldering ashes in the centre of the floor, and sent up a dancing flame. Its flickering light for an instant revealed the flowing robe, with its many coloured fringe, thrown back upon Barbara's shoulders, above which her head rose as if enthroned. Her beauty was enhanced by contrast with the gloomy surroundings and her eyes shone. Oliver drew her back quickly as far as possible from the opening near the guards, whispering as he did so:

"If they saw that blaze they will be in here in a moment."

But the group of warriors were too comfortable to disturb themselves, and Barbara, drawing herself away, said hurriedly:

"I want you to make your escape instantly. Take this cloak. You can creep out at the back of the tent and make your way down to the timber. At least there's a chance."

She was thinking of what Oliver knew nothing of, the probable return of Mendenhall and his Missourians, wild with victory over Brown, and gloating over the recapture of Oliver.

But he cried:

"It would be too desperately risky. Nothing less than a miracle would enable us to get away safely."

"Not both of us, but you!"

"Alone! What must you think of me? Save myself and leave you here? Not all the furies can make me stir!" he cried, with a look that the darkness deprived of a meaning.

"You must," she answered him. "You don't know what has happened."

Oliver was ready to declare that anything might happen which did not separate them. But Barbara continued: "That letter."

"Oh, that letter," he interrupted, "that you restored to me. That you saved. I can never tell you how surprised and how glad I was. It was my talisman. I had it from Brown when I was wavering and it decided me. I think of its noble words as my commission. And that you should have had it and cared for it!"

"I don't mean that letter," she hurriedly cried. It was evident that Oliver was still ignorant of the betraying dispatches from Mendenhall.

"I don't mean that letter. There was another!"

"You had another?"

"Yes!" Barbara paused. How could she tell him. How could she make it clear to him that the betrayal of Brown, though actually accomplished through her, was entirely against her own will or knowledge.

Instead of helping her out, Oliver, whose thoughts were far from being fixed upon the fears that haunted her, whispered confidingly:

"Can you remember our first meeting?"

Barbara felt that he was standing very near.

"I am thinking of what is to happen to us now," she replied.

"And I am thinking of when I lay in that block house at Star Cross, it was your face that appeared at the window! Your care that restored me to life, your——"

"Hush!" Barbara cried hurriedly. "Hush! The guard will hear you!"

"And I was thinking," he added more moderately, "that then you kept me, tried to keep me. You chained me with your own hands. But now——"

"You are keeping me from telling you what you must know. You must understand at once."

"But I prefer not to understand. I don't want to know!"

"You must."

"Well, first let me tell you this. Nothing you want me to know will alter my purpose. Nothing! When I seemed in doubt and suspected you yesterday, the suspicion was not mine; it was another's. It is impossible for me to—to doubt—you—ever—in anything!"

The dumbness which sometimes seizes sensitive natures at times when everything in the world should make them speak, and speak quickly, held Barbara then for an eternal moment! She could not speak, and Oliver thought he learned that, which forever and ever, would be joy and gladness to his soul! But a sense of shame, as well as fear, and a thousand doubts were piercing Barbara's heart, and something like a sob shook her breast. Instantly she was in his arms again. But at the same mo-

ment a noise, as though the very gates of hell were opened, shook the air.

The Missourians had returned.

CHAPTER XV

YELLING, howling, and cheering for President Pierce, who aided them with a company of dragoons, and for long Dave Atchison, who led them, the Missourians, with a motley assortment of raiders, and fillibusters, came roaring into the Indian village.

It was two hours after sunset. Having lost their way in the swamp, a detour to a lonely wayside grocery store had been made, resulting in a condition of turbulent intoxication. Discipline was impossible, and the leaders, amused at the ludicrous antics of their men, allowed ungovernable riot to run its own way.

As the first shouts of the incoming cavalcade rent the air, the Indians, always preternaturally apprehensive after dark, clutched their bows and tomahawks, and ran together towards the inner campfires, setting up the frightful cries used to terrify wolves, or drive away thunderstorms.

Supposing the terrific tumult an attack by some wandering band, such as frequently passed across the reservations, Oliver thought only of how they might best escape in the confusion. The Indians guarding the tent had fled with the rest to the inner lines.

"The way is clear," Oliver cried, throwing open the door curtain. "There are horses plunging at their tether down there near the timber. Let us run for it."

But Barbara, in fear and horror, turned numb and unable to move. The shock of inhuman yells and howls was alone enough to chill the blood. But a deadly fear filled Barbara's heart, that for the second time she was betraying Oliver. Had she only told him they were the Missourians, he might have already saved himself.

Before she could speak, the Indians, discovering that the new arrivals were friendly, welcomed them with renewed yellings, even more fearful in sound and volume, than their previous howls of terror. Like a tempest sweeping through a long dry forest, the tumult drove across the village lanes, and roared into the open space before the guard tent. Then Barbara suddenly recovered her self-possession. She threw herself before Oliver, forcing him back into the tent.

"You must not be taken again," she cried. "These are Missourians."

At that moment, ruffianly faces, illumined with flaring torches, appeared at the doorway.

"He's in here," cried one.

"Out with him, an' roast the hide off him."

There was a rush into the tent. Barbara was swept aside, and the light poles of the frail structure giving way, the whole tent fell upon the rabble, amid a storm of ascending oaths.

For some minutes Barbara was buried beneath falling

hides and dust. When in the end she managed to creep out, she saw jostling, staggering figures moving towards the largest campfire, with Oliver, lashed to a pole, carried over the heads of the surging crowd.

In a panic of fright she stood, breathless, trembling, wild with terror, helpless!

Before she could think or act, the young squaw who had earned her ring, touched her on the shoulder and made signs that she should follow her. Regardless of the squaw's gesticulations, Barbara attempted to rush after the disappearing crowd. The squaw, however, plunging behind her, as a young buffalo might in unseating a rider, lifted her easily from her feet, and answering her screams with a monotonous, "Hum! hum! hum!" trotted away with her to the chief's lodge.

A fire in the centre of the big teepee had been quickly replenished, and was filling the dark interior with a bright light from its quivering, up-shooting flames. Green Turtle, temporarily roused to a sense of the opportunity of receiving "good gifts" from his victorious visitors, was half perched, half propped, upon a high roll of whitened skins. The lower part of his huge, hog-shaped face, was gruesomely broadened into a strained, changeless smile. But above it the sunken and contracted eyes gleamed furtively and suspiciously. He held before him his great treaty pipe, used only upon important occasions, a wonderful work of strikingly discordant colours, the stone bowl elaborately carved in the proportions of a river turtle, the long reed stem decorated with tufts of hair,

coloured rings, and feathers of the golden eagle. Round the circle his councillors were gathered, their painted faces and feathered tufts gleaming picturesquely in the fitful ruddy glow. On either side of the big chief, the leaders of the Missourians were just taking their places.

The young squaw, with Barbara in her arms, trotted briskly to the very feet of the smiling chief, and there, dropping on her knees, deposited her captured charge safely before him.

Barbara was flushed and angry, but anxiety for Oliver dissipated all thought of herself; breathlessly she appealed to the great chief.

"The white prisoner!" she cried, her voice quivering with emotion, and the extraordinary effort she made in the midst of her excitement, to compel the attention of the monster to whom she appealed. "The white prisoner! They are killing him, killing him. Here in your village. You, Chief, you, and every one of your tribe, will be hnuted down by my white people if he is killed here."

The set, extensive smile on the stolid countenance of the chief, did not relax a hair's breadth. He stared blandly upon Barbara's upturned face, and though he uttered not a sound, nor made the slightest movement, Barbara thought his snaky eyes took a brighter gleam, as in enjoyment of her evident distress. She vehemently repeated her threat, and demanded that instant steps be taken to stop the brutal murder before it was too late.

Her speech and breath exhausted, the impenetrable stupidity of the great "Green Turtle" seemed for a brief

instant to waver; he raised his pipe, moved it very slowly, once to the right, once to the left, and then a slight undulation of the lips puckering the centre of his extensive smile, he murmured: "How, how!—hum,—how, how!" Beyond this, he expressed no sign of intelligence, and except for the keen twinkling of his eyes, appeared wilfully and stubbornly obtuse.

Barbara, turning despairingly away, addressed her appeal to the two or three Missourian leaders, who had now seated themselves beside the Chief.

"Do you know what is being done?" she cried, passionately. "Are any of you friends of Colonel Mendenhall?"

At this enquiry the men exchanged meaning glances, and General Stringfellow, rising very deliberately, said, with his soft southern drawl:

"My dear young lady, is it possible you can be a friend of our dear friend Mendenhall! We are all good Missourians here, all good Missourians, let me assure you. A friend of Mendenhall's can command every mother's son of us. Eh, Atchison?"

"Surely, surely," Atchison responded, also rising, and as in a nearer view it was discovered that the excited young lady was strikingly handsome, the officers vied with each other in making immediate advances. They urged her to be calm, and every assistance in their power should certainly be given her.

"Now we don't know you, my dear, and you may be sure we shall be perfectly discreet. Oh, you can be sure of that. Eh, Atchison? Eh, Buford?" The grizzled

face of the wild old frontier fighter and border raider, gleamed with delight in his own humour. "It ain't a bit of matter who in thunder you are, my dear, if you're a friend of Menhenhall's, then I say every mother's son of us here is a friend of yours, and that's so."

"Let the young lady honour me by accepting this bear-skin seat," said Buford. "On my soul it's the most luxurious throne ever in a camp."

But Barbara, quickly conscious that no manner of help was to be had from these men, turned upon them scornfully.

"If any one of you is a man, and willing to give deeds and not lip service, let him save the life of a fellow creature, who at this moment is being hurried to torture and death."

"That will I," cried Buford, moved to gallantry by the passion of Barbara's voice, and the shining lustre of her flashing eyes.

But Stringfellow jostled against him, hoarsely whispering: "Shut up! You ain't in Carolina. It's a damned abolitionist they're settling with." Then turning again to Barbara, he continued: "You misunderstand us, my dear. Come, I'm old enough to be your father; now tell me all about it! Who is this man? Are you a particular friend of his as well as of Mendenhall?"

At the insinuation Barbara's face flamed. She turned to fly. Hopeless of any possible help, she determined to throw herself upon the slaughterers, and share, if she could not prevent, Oliver's fate.

She was powerless, however, even to escape. Round the lodge, on every side, were eagle-eyed guards, the entrance was filled with watchful faces.

At that moment a gigantic Indian, son-in-law of the chief, pushed his way into the crowded interior, closely followed by Mendenhall.

On seeing Barbara, Mendenhall uttered a joyous cry of recognition.

"I have searched the whole village for you. This is glorious! Found, found! And more radiant than ever. Gentlemen, this is the heroine of the hour. By her hand and wit our campaign was saved from a disastrous termination. Gentlemen, I present Miss Barbara Fairfax!"

"We are honoured." "Welcome indeed!" "Honour to Miss Fairfax!" went up enthusiastic ejaculations. Even the torpid old chief "How, howed," and waved his pipe.

But Barbara, the intensity of her fear for Oliver increasing every minute, cried out: "Thank heaven you have come; the ruffianly villains, rushing into the village, mad, and drunk, are in the very act of hideously murdering Mr. Wentworth who—who was so, so considerate to you in Brown's camp!"

Mendenhall's face darkened, but there was a twitching smile about his lips.

"Well, now, I am sorry such an unfortunate fate should have befallen so good a man. But then, so it is with us men of war. We none of us know what sudden turn of the wheel may end our career. He was a good fellow too, I can say that of him."

Barbara caught her breath; she felt chilled, not only by Mendenhall's words, but by the cool tone of indifference he assumed.

"Stop them!" she cried, eyeing him with all her old dignity and sense of her power with him. "Stop them! Go at once, you can save him. They will obey you!"

"There you are mistaken," he replied quietly. "The man is a determined anti-Southerner, a defier of our just laws, an insurrectionist, a slave stealer. It would be as useless as it would be absurd for me to interfere."

It leaped to Barbara's lips to tell him he lied, but at the same moment the awful peril in which Oliver's life hung, the frightful possibility that even now it might be too late to save him, overwhelmed every other thought. She stood facing Mendenhall, a strange hesitation, a trembling irresolution playing in the lines of her red lips, and palpitating in the depths of her shining eyes.

Mendenhall misinterpreted these signs. The quick success of his plan of rescue, the exhilaration of meeting his old associates, the night adventure, the drink, all tended to excite him. His usually cold heart began to glow. He bent over Barbara, whispering proud words of joy to be with her, of promise that most quickly he would take her away from this horrible situation. Even boldly declaring that life should be taken up again by both of them in new and passionate delight.

She shrank from him with a helpless look. Then a fiendish, pitiless, reverberating yell, rang wildly through the dark night. For an instant Barbara turned deadly

white, but without taking her eyes from Mendenhall she suddenly flung her arms upon him, putting her face to his with a beseeching, appealing expression that might have pierced a heart of stone. "Don't let him die! Don't let this man's murder be upon our hands! Save him! Save him! And then, then—then—"

"God d—n it, Mendenhall!" Buford burst forth. But Mendenhall was whispering a passionate question in Barbara's ear! She still clung to him, though her head sank till her face was hidden. Then she assented in a low voice. Mendenhall embraced her passionately, and turning, strode out of the lodge, thrusting the crowd apart, and raising his commanding voice in loud calls to his lieutenants, Buckskin Bill and Stein.

Loosely lashed to the tapering end of a lodge pole, Oliver Wentworth swung high in the air, over the leaping flames of the hastily replenished campfire, in the middle of the widest village street. Like a well sweep, the pole, held by a dozen grinning Indians, bent and recovered, and each time the body of the unhappy victim descended into the crackling fagots, and sprang up again into the spark-filled curtain of yellow smoke.

The occasion of the sudden revengeful yell, which had just reverberated throughout the camp, was not the final completion of the horrid scene, but, on the contrary, rather a misfortune which tended to benefit the miserable sufferer. For the thongs tying him slipped, and at a rebound of the long pole into the air his body came slithering down upon the heads of the Indians, causing the

whole party of executioners to fall together in a heap.

Before the pole and ropes had been readjusted, though eager hands fought in drunken desire to participate in the brutal murder, Mendenhall was on the scene. By the quick use of loud oaths, and the declaration that in their drunken foolishness they were throwing away ransom money enough to feather all their nests, he checked the ill-directed passions of the leaders, and getting his own men to take possession of Oliver, he mounted a tobacco hogshead and addressed the wild-eyed, hooting, and roaring crowd, on the glories of Southern conquest in Kansas, of the great slave State they were going to erect on these plains of the sun; of how Franklin Pierce, Dave Atchison, and old "Bull in the Woods," as the colonel of dragoons was then humourously nicknamed, were all sound on the goose, that no more abolitionists need apply, and that Union or no Union, the greatest institution on the face of the earth, the oldest, and the only safe foundation for an independent, rich and prosperous nation, the great institution of slavery was going to be maintained; now, henceforth, and forever!

CHAPTER XVI

TO snatch a dainty morsel from the very jaws of a wild beast about to devour it, demands some qualities of nerve and will. Colonel Mendenhall was, however, admirably adapted to the part. He had the subtlety to understand the swaying emotions of a mob. The address to turn them from one passion to another. Thus he inflamed the hearts of his hearers with greed and love of spoil, while Oliver was carried into safety.

He was both eloquent and passionate in his stirring harangue. Never in his life had he felt such satisfaction with himself and fortune. After the humiliating reverse at Black Jack, the success of his plan of attack upon Brown's camp, with the liberation of the Missourians, was balm to his pride. He regretted that Brown and his followers had escaped, but news from Washington assured the immediate energetic co-operation of the Federal Government in the suppression of the Free State party in Kansas, and the extermination of the abolitionists would inevitably follow. Beyond every other consideration, however, his heart was jubilant in the supreme triumph he had won over Barbara. His own vanity of nature blinded him altogether from recognising the brutality of

the compulsion under which Barbara had consented to his passionate demand. He had no sensitiveness to warn him of the danger of such methods upon a spirit of the quality and temper which Barbara possessed. He loved the girl with an intensity, so real and genuine, that he had no doubt of being able to draw from her in time a corresponding emotion. His experience was sufficient to have taught him that a woman, though never to be understood and never to be fathomed by reason or cool calculation, is much more likely to be won by audacity and masterful force than by timid service. Much more likely to love the hand that seizes, than the hand that soothes her. But he had not known enough women of the finer type to judge well in Barbara's case. He had no suspicion that his sudden act of triumphant desire might be reckoned the unpardonable sin.

It was, therefore, with supreme satisfaction that Colonel Mendenhall restored Barbara to her anxious parents, and the happy security of the comfortable parsonage at Star Cross. Oliver Wentworth was also carried back, with the return of his captors, and once more became an occupant of the block house; this time, however, under Mendenhall's direct orders, he was treated with the utmost courtesy, well fed, though strongly guarded. He was, indeed, only detained by his own obstinacy. Mendenhall offered him his immediate liberty to return to his home in Boston, and urged him to go, asking only his word of honour that he would give no more aid to the Free State cause in Kansas. But Oliver had gone too far now to

be willing to do this. He had come to regard John Brown as the leader, not of a poor handful of recruits, but of all who cherished the honour and purity and godliness of their beloved country. He recognised in Brown the qualities of the hero, the prophet and the martyr. He believed that no one saw with clearer eye the inevitable destiny hanging like a flaming sword above the Nation's unconscious head. In the stern-faced Puritan Captain, he recognised a heroism capable of concealing his own tenderness of heart, in his very life blood, shed to save those for whom he wept in secret. That anti-slavery cause, which in Boston was a principle, was now a passion. Nothing could induce Oliver to withdraw the allegiance of his hand and heart. Fate might hold him a prisoner, and inactive, but he would never, by any act of his own, forfeit his right to suffer with those who were in bonds, as bound with them. Never, while life thrilled his heart, would he consent to withdraw his hand.

The news which followed the return of Mendenhall and his men to Star Cross, was of a nature to make the Southern Colonel still more lenient towards his prisoner. Everything indicated that Brown's little band was completely disheartened. Government troopers were patrolling the whole of southeastern Kansas, the anti-slavery settlers were thoroughly cowed, and the chances seemed all to favour the hope of the Southerners, that the new territory would speedily be admitted to the Union as a State, pledged to support the great institution of slavery.

Meanwhile Barbara went about, trying to be proud

with the heart of a criminal. She had sinned for a noble end, yet it fettered her, heart and soul, soul and body! She went as one tongue-tied and fever-smitten. In reality it was simple enough. She had saved Oliver Wentworth's life by dropping black poison into her own. The promise she had given Mendenhall held her in torture. She went about the garden and on her rides with a bright spot in each cheek, her dry lips parted, the health of her countenance expiring in the growing darkness of her troubled eyes. At first she thought of her pledge to Mendenhall only as a deliberate lie. A lie for which she somewhat justly excused herself, by the irresistible compulsion of the circumstances. But now she had been compelled to maintain the falsehood, and keep it masquerading as truth. She dare not fling back her vow to Mendenhall, until Oliver was away from Star Cross, out of the Colonel's power. She had framed some temporary excuse to postpone the announcement even to her parents, but there was reason to believe that Mendenhall had contrived to let her father into the secret. Under the pressure of these conditions, Barbara, who had at first resolved to avoid seeing Oliver, determined that she must make an effort to persuade him to consent to a parole, and return to the East. To accomplish this, she brought about an arrangement by which Oliver was given the privilege of taking exercise in the parsonage garden, and as he willingly pledged himself not to use the opportunity to effect an escape, he was permitted to spend a large part of his time in the enjoyment of this privilege. Here Barbara

met him. It was a dangerous meeting. On his side he was unsafely ignorant of the part Barbara had played. He did not know of her promise to Mendenhall or that her desire to save him still kept her bound. He could not guess the anxiety, the strain and suffering she had undergone, and against which she was still bravely struggling.

On her part she felt so keenly the unreality of the situation that she was embarrassed, constrained and utterly unable to speak or conduct herself with the winning freedom and grace so natural to her.

However, Barbara saw no other way out of her dilemma, she must compel Oliver to give his parole, for all attempt at an escape was out of the question under Mendenhall's military watchfulness; and while Oliver was still within the Colonel's power, Barbara dare not break the cruel promise she had been so unjustly and brutally compelled to give.

She therefore met Oliver again and again, so persistently urging him, that he suddenly stopped coming into the garden, and confined his exercise to the narrow walk within the block house enclosure.

At this Barbara was by turns, incredulous, indignant, and tearful.

Finally she sent for him.

Having dispatched Toffy, with a peremptory message, saying that she desired to see him immediately at the big tulip tree, she caught up one of Mrs. Gibson's babies; (the family were staying at the rectory before being sent

to Boston) and holding the child in her arms, as a soft shelter for her own fevered face, she awaited the interview.

Oliver came promptly. His head buoyantly upheld, and evident determination written on his face.

"I have asked you to come," Barbara began, plunging at once into the midst of her difficult subject, "because I feel sure you do not understand how seriously your refusal to give your parole is—is, upsetting my plans, is making my life miserable, unbearable! Mr. Wentworth, can't you, won't you, give your word and go?"

Barbara stopped suddenly, abashed at her own impetuosity and cuddled the fat baby furiously. But she was startled into self-possession again by the ring in Oliver's voice, as he answered, passionately:

"Would to God, I could!"

Then Barbara, without disclosing her real reasons, endeavoured to show him that it was the only practical thing for him to do. That, indeed, any other course was rash and unwise, for there was no longer a Free State party in Kansas; the whole movement was crushed; there was nothing to be done but retreat and why should he remain in useless restraint when without injuring anyone by a word he could be free. Oliver heard her quietly. His clear eyes tried to search her face, but the baby proved a bulwark of protection.

Then he said very steadily: "You have no scruple in urging me to become a traitor to my own heart; to prove myself either a coward or a liar, for the sake of sav-

ing my neck. You must have some most excellent reason for being so anxious to dispose of me!"

Barbara said nothing to that; she only kept her face behind the chubby child.

"I cannot do it," Oliver ended. "I never can." Slowly, with a reserved bow, he turned to go.

"Stay!" she cried, with an appealing note, in which the great pain she had been enduring, the mental suffering of weeks, found pathetic expression. "I ask it. I am willing to beg of you to do this, for my sake!"

Oliver turned again and came closer. His calmness was nearly gone. He cried out:

"I don't pretend to understand you. What have I done? Can my mere presence disturb your happiness? Imprisoned, watched, every movement and word suspected? Can I injure anyone? Can I reveal my secrets? Can I play the spy?"

Barbara answered nothing. She suddenly hoped that by plunging still deeper in his complete misconception of her motives, the truth might be so buried as never to be uncovered.

"Let me tell you this," he added, and there was a growing bitterness stealing into his voice. "I am perfectly content to sacrifice my privileges. Let me be left in my prison. Why disturb yourself by seeing me? It is not by my wish. . . . Why not let me alone, be my fate what it may, it is my own affair!"

He little knew how his words stung. Barbara's heart flamed. What was he thinking of her? She dare not

reveal to him the sacrifice he was compelling her to endure. Yet in anger she could not repress; she flashed out:

"I hope I shall never, never see you again. Or hear of you. Leave me!"

She did not look up. She clutched the Gibson child still closer in an effort to calm herself.

The way of a woman is always by paths unmapped and by passes unknown. Her ends are gained the moment she ceases to seek them. While Barbara pleaded, Oliver was rigid. Now he was all submission. He begged her to forget anything and everything which had given her offence. He declared he had no wish to do anything but that which should be pleasing to her. Life was a brief business at best, and what reason had he to care.

Here the Gibson baby, either in sympathy with Barbara's beating heart, or because it felt itself in a false position, wrinkled up its round cheeks in fantastic creases and began a muffled whine, which threatened to develop very speedily into a lusty cry. Hurriedly Barbara strove to comfort it. But the child felt her nervousness and grew violent.

Then Oliver came near and held out his arms, and before Barbara could check it, the little one stretched out its chubby hands and sprang from her.

In a moment the child looked down from Oliver's broad shoulders and laughed defiance.

Barbara shook her finger, and cried: "Now you want to come back to me, don't you?"

"No," Oliver answered with determination, "baby's going to run back to the house now, all by her own bright little self, isn't she?" and he set the child down. "Run, now, you little toddler, run!" And the child set off as obedient as a dove from the hand.

Then, in the mysterious alchemy of human emotions, their positions were again reversed.

"It is torture to me to remain here," he cried. "Every moment I am driven by fiends! Tonight your earnest desire to be rid of me shall be gratified. I swear it. You shall see me no more."

Barbara grew weak. She could no longer shield herself from his searching eyes, and her restraint began rapidly to disappear. With ridiculous timidity she could only murmur:

"I don't want you to go." Her voice trembled, her lips quivered.

Oliver was not sure that he heard her aright, he feared to ask. And as they stood in that stupid fashion, their blending shadows making a sharp silhouette in the brilliant sunlight, Colonel Mendenhall came, looking for Barbara. He was finding little more satisfaction in the present arrangement than was his prisoner. He, however, concealed his irritation by a show of haughty, galling superiority conscious of his power and waiting only the favourable opportunity to remove Oliver from the Fairfax influence.

"Ah, my dear Miss Fairfax," there was a perfect sweetness of suavity in his fine voice, and the very studied

polish of manner served to make more impressive his cool disregard of Oliver's presence. "This torrid sun! It is positively imprudent for you to stand out in the very flood of it. The boys have brought round my new covered buggy, and a span of the handsomest bays! I want you to try them. We will take the eastern river road, under the big beeches; there will be both air and shade. If it will afford you the least pleasure, it will give me so much."

It was upon her tongue to hastily decline, and her dark eyes perhaps flashed as much, for Mendenhall glanced quickly and sternly towards Oliver. But before she spoke another and wiser thought came to her rescue, and without a smile, yet not ungraciously, she thanked him for the courtesy, and with a quiet, "Pardon me, Mr. Wentworth!" to Oliver, turned to the Colonel, and together they returned to the house.

Oliver stood, grinding his teeth, in mad, impotent, insulted rage. Then the whole earth seemed to grow very still; he ceased digging his heels in the gravel, and wondered how the Almighty could waste such beauty, as was showered upon this Southern climate, on a land so cursed and smitten with evil.

As he stood, the shimmering heat waving, rising, vibrating, about him, he seemed to dream. The wash of clean crisp sandy northern beaches was in his ears. The smell of kelp and salt marsh, and the great, wholesome, briny ocean, filled him with infinite home longings. Oh,

God, that he had stayed there! Nothing but disaster had followed him here.

Presently a sharp clicking sound striking the ear with vicious vindictiveness, broke his reverie.

He was aware that Master Phil was pattering towards him, his iron-shod crutches moving with the energetic impulse of his alert, restless mind.

Before Oliver could thoroughly arouse himself, the youngster was close upon him, his piping voice raised in chuckling amusement.

"Tell it not in Gath, lest the daughter of the Philistines rejoice. Eh? Eh? The sword of the mighty was vilely cast away! Couldn't use it any more, eh? Oh, Lord! Don't look like that! I wish to Heaven you'd be sociable, as long as they've let you out of irons, and out of the block house, though they were fools to do it; I've told them that often enough. And they are, too. I can see through you, and they'll rue it yet. Still as long as you are out, you know, why can't you be civil to a fellow? Especially when he's a sickly little cripple and needing all the amusement he can find! You know you'd make a stunning Menelaus in one of my tragedies!"

"I have no objection to being civil to you," Oliver replied, slowly and with some emphasis. "As long as you will regard it as a definite personal favour, shown to your physical infirmities, and therefore govern your venomous tongue as the purchase price. Otherwise, my young Tartufe, you and I had better keep apart."

"Who's Tartufe, I never heard of him. He wasn't a

Greek or a Roman, and he ain't in the Bible, is he?" Phil piped, turning up his impish little wizened face, with cool impertinence.

"If I told you you wouldn't like it. You need not know. He was not a fine model."

"Was he a human fiend? Was he a very devil? Was he a hypocrite, and a demon, and a beast? Eh? Is that what you mean, you damned Yankee thief—you gaol bird!"

The rush of his demoniac temper, sweeping the boy into a perfect frenzy of madness, he hurled one of his crutches with all his might at Oliver's head, and then stood balanced perilously on the other, glaring and muttering. Oliver easily caught the flying crutch, though he was fairly startled at the ferocity of Phil's ungovernable passion.

"Here, my little man, that's a nice way to promote my civility. I'm mightily tempted to chuck you into the river."

"You daren't lay a finger on me, you know that, you fool. If you touched me, to harm me, here in this garden, they'd flay you alive before morning. Damn it! What did you excite me so for! Here, you may as well give me that crutch. I shall fall if you don't. Then there'll be a rumpus, and you'll most likely be locked up again."

Oliver hardly suppressed a smile at the perfect imperturbation of the boy. But he gave him his crutch, with the cautionary advice: "You and I may as well ignore

each other, we shall never agree, and it will only make trouble."

"Here, come back a minute," Phil called sharply, as Oliver turned on his heel, "Look here! Tell me where I can find out about Tartufe. I like devils. I get new ideas from them."

"Bible characters are all you need," Oliver laughed.

"No. I say. Come back a minute. I'll tell you something I'll bet you a dollar you don't know, and you'll give me a hundred dollars to hear it. Come back a minute. Here, let's sit under this tulip tree. Gosh! your making me mad like that, 's just taken all the breath out of my body."

The little fellow squatted in the shade and picked up a broad, smooth saddle-leaf for a fan.

Oliver turned indulgently, though every word of the boy's talk irritated him, and stretching out a long arm leaned with his outspread palm against the smooth bark of the big boled tulip tree.

"Say!" Phil began, with a spluttering breathless gurgle of sound, half laughter, and half sneer. "Say! It makes me cuddle myself to think how much Mendenhall's going to enjoy his nice afternoon ride with Barbara today."

Oliver's face set rigidly, and he began again to contemplate means of vengeance upon this frail embodiment of human depravity.

"Gosh!" the little cripple continued, striking a repelling attitude, "I never saw a worse sign of brewing mischief than Babbie's blinking eyes. When they're big and

sunny, and kind of half full of dreams, you can do most anything with her, but when she makes them small and looks as if she were peeking through a refrigerator, then look out! I guess temper is a sort of birthright in our family. Well, I saw them go out to the buggy, brand new, Colonel's latest nobby thing; don't you suppose any girl's eyes would brighten up to see that buggy and that span? Babbie's, sir, were like pins. Oh, I swan, he'll have a pleasant ride. What in the mischief was in the wind, do you reckon?"

This turn of the conversation was not altogether uninteresting to Oliver but he looked severely down at Phil's upturned keenly enquiring face and offered no suggestion.

"Well, that's it. I'll tell you. They're having a fine spat over you, Mr. Wentworth."

Still Oliver repressed his feelings.

"Do you think I don't know?" Phil cried, quickening his sharp, nervous speech, "I'll bet you a horse, I know. I know everything that's going on around these parts. It's as good as a chapter of Roman history to see what fools people are about their own business. There's old Dad, he patters in and out of the church, in and out of his parsonage, in and out of the village, and he talks high-handed to everybody all the time and he knows no more what's passing under his nose than the cross on top of the church spire. There's Mendenhall! There's another fool. He won't take my advice; he thinks his men tell him what's happening! Why, they don't know. I've warned him, but he's a fool, and won't listen. Wait till

the niggers give us all a surprise party one of these nights, then they'll find out I knew something. Then, here's yourself. You're another fool—I'll prove it!" as Oliver began to show signs of impatience. "If you meant business, the same as they say there's some in the North do; meant to cram the Union down our throats and set the slaves free, you wouldn't be loafing around this garden. It ain't your parole, not a bit, it's Babbie keeps you here!"

Then Oliver started. He moved upon the grinning little creature with a look that sent even that imperturbable youngster into instant terror.

"Here, stop it! Don't touch me! I'll scream murder!" he shouted, cowering, and raising his crutches above him in genuine alarm.

"Bah!" Oliver recovered his self-possession. "You miserable child. You're hopelessly distorted. Your head's full of deviltry, and your heart's worse!"

Oliver swung away at a rapid pace, anxious to get out of earshot of the boy's voice, which was even then calling after him, " You fool, you! You're as blind as all the rest!"

CHAPTER XVII

MASTER PHIL'S announcement that the buggy drive, skilfully planned by the Colonel, would not prove so agreeable as that shrewd officer anticipated, was prophetic. The afternoon was outrageously hot, though the horses swung along in such lively fashion that the heat was tempered by the moving air. The Colonel noted, however, a severe expression of settled determination upon Barbara's face, and opened the conversation with evident desire to bring about more cordial relations.

"You remember that deer hound you were admiring yesterday," he began. "I found it belonged to one of Buford's men, and I was fortunate enough to be able to secure it. You may be sure nothing gives me more pleasure than to ask you to accept him from me. I hope he'll prove as good as he certainly looks, and that he will win his way by his courage and fidelity into your ever-deepening affection."

"It is very kind of you," Barbara began, without any smile of approval, "but—"

"Don't say a word," the Colonel interrupted. "He is yours for better, for worse."

This phrase with which the Colonel emphasised his

gift, jarred rudely upon Barbara's apprehensive mind, and she hastened to add:

"I could not possibly accept him, Colonel Mendenhall. I beg you not to insist, I—"

"Why, Barbara!" Mendenhall cried, and there was rising feeling in his voice, for he felt instantly that this was a definite preliminary rebuff, and meant that Barbara was preparing him for more serious disappointment. "Surely you will not be so merciless! Have I not tried most sincerely to bend absolutely to your wishes? Have I offended in a single instance? Have I not been the most reserved, discreet, unimpassioned lover imaginable?"

"I know, I know," Barbara cried. "You have so far treated me with forbearance and courtesy, but the situation is nevertheless too, too impossible for me! I am at your mercy, as a point of honour, but there are other considerations, there are deeper things than life or death. I—I cannot love you."

This declaration did not appal Mendenhall. He had reckoned with it. He desired only to overcome her scruples even a little at a time; he had already been happily successful in drawing her into a secret and confidential engagement; that, in itself, he knew to be a great step; it gave him opportunities, it accustomed her to his companionship; he was impatient for more, and for closer intimacy, but he was willing to wait, confident that time would work many changes. He had in fact foreseen that he might have a repetition of scenes of this nature with Barbara, and he had schooled himself with the ut-

most patience to endeavour to convince her of the real sincerity of his love, and of the certain power he possessed to bring her eventually to look upon him with different eyes.

"Ah, Barbara!" he began, with softly modulated and persuasive voice, letting his dark and languorous eyes rest earnestly upon her troubled face, "You are so pure, so good, so beautiful, it is not to be expected you could love any man in the fulness of the ideal passion you picture to yourself. All men are mortal, and there is nothing in real life that can match your perfect fancy. No woman ever finds the love she vainly imagines, and the only way to secure your own happiness is just to accept your fate, and take the imperfections with the good qualities in the man who is able to offer you not only the proper rank and position to which you are entitled, but the absolute devotion of his heart and soul. Do not, do not turn away from me."

"It is utterly useless for us to discuss it!" Barbara cried hotly, her heart revolting from the consequences of the equivocal position in which she was placed.

"It cannot be altogether useless, Barbara, if it is but to give me the chance of telling you what a change you have already wrought in me. I was cold, I was selfish, I cared only for ambition, and daring adventure, until I saw you. You have filled me with one passion, one thought; nothing in all the world has any other value now than to serve you. You have possessed me, Barbara, body and soul. I sleep only with your picture in my eyes. I wake

only to call upon your name, to rise to your demands, to work for your happiness, to plan for your pleasure. There is no spot of my past and present, there shall be no moment of my future that is not dedicated in sacred joy, to you only, and forever to you."

The horses, after the first stretch of level road, were now climbing the ascent to the big beeches which crowned the rolling hillside above the river, and were walking leisurely. Mendenhall turned beseechingly to his companion. But Barbara was impassive and unmoved. She was fighting against her fears for Oliver's safety, and her intense desire to rid herself of her terrible pledge to this man, whom she dreaded as an enemy. As Mendenhall spoke her heart grew colder and colder, for in spite of his fine words she instinctively felt that he meant to hold her to the very letter of her vow.

She had come out with the sudden resolve to put an end to her wrong relationship to Mendenhall, and then if necessary to confess to him her own irresistible passion for this Northern prisoner, appealing to him on her knees if necessary to spare him for her sake. She already felt, however, that such a course would be madness. There was no strength in Mendenhall great enough to support such confidence, nay, with horror Barbara felt, as she heard his insinuating pleading, that did she arouse the least suspicion of jealousy in Mendenhall, Oliver's life would be the forfeit. She even feared the consequences of her refusal to hear him. Yet her present humiliating position could not be endured.

By a great effort Barbara repressed her own indignant remonstrance, and with something of softening emotion in her voice, said:

"You would not urge your own sister to marry for convenience!"

"Convenience! I speak for reason and love."

"Oh, you are indeed very unselfish, Colonel. You see only what is to be for my benefit; you leave it to me to consider yours. Think, I beg of you, what a really ridiculous thing it would be for you to throw yourself away upon a stupid, spoiled, and altogether rustic daughter of a Missourian clergyman! You, who have but to choose the fairest of Virginia's famous beauties."

"Barbara, not all the proudest women of Richmond, not all the trained coquettes thronging the Governour's receptions, can compare with you. Your beauty, your grace, your grand air, the very haughtiness of your innocence, place you above them all."

"You are ridiculous! But alas, Colonel, though you may blind yourself to such considerations, there are still worse defects on my part, alone sufficient to repel any sane man. My whims, and irritable temper would perpetually vex you, at other times my dark moodiness, my unsociability, even sullenness, would constantly lead you to regret the day you first saw me."

"Never! I know you well enough. The delicacy of your conscience while exaggerating in your own mind mere shadows into definite faults, saves you from ever falling into the errors you so clearly perceive. You have

no faults, Barbara! You have all the keen subtlety of a quick instinct to avoid them. Let me tell you again, a thousand times, everything you conceive as a possible defect in yourself is infinitely lovely, and winning, and precious in my eyes. I would not have you one atom other, within or without, than just what you are, my Queen and Star, my life's angel, my—"

"No, Colonel Mendenhall, no! For pity's sake, do not lose your usual sanity. I have a worse fault than all others combined. Believe this and let it end your madness and my folly in having ever assented to it. I am incapable of all that should be the first demand of happy married life; I can smile at you, or frown, laugh at or repel you, but all your earnest declarations of affection or love or whatever it may be that stirs your heart, do not touch or move me; believe me, I am heartless and irresponsive. In a few short months I should drive you into a frenzy when you discovered that every word of your flattery was wasted, every throb of your heart spent in vain; that nothing under heaven that you could do or say could gain the least thrill of response from a heart that is incapable of feeling."

"I do not believe you, Barbara! I remember the moment in the Shawnee camp when all your soul shone in your passionate eyes, when you flung yourself upon my breast! Cold? Your heart was aflame then!"

The Colonel watched Barbara's face, and his eyes gleamed with a swift flash like the glint of steel, as in spite of her utmost effort, the deep red tide of her heart's

crimson store set in full flood to her averted face, round her curved neck, and over both her dainty, shell-shaped ears.

For this, however, as for Barbara's first repulsion, Mendenhall was perfectly prepared. Barbara's timid desire to keep from him all hint of her own real feeling towards Oliver was altogether futile, but the result was very different from that which Barbara anticipated.

While Mendenhall began to see the folly of directly opposing her, he remembered how easily Barbara had fallen into the simple little deception he carried out in Brown's camp, how readily she yielded to the appeal to her feminine instincts, the service to be rendered his aged mother. He saw a still deeper stratagem now, which might disarm Barbara's prejudice against himself, lead to the final riddance of this detested rival, and finally bring Barbara back again to himself with the impulse of admiration for his magnanimity.

The summit of the steep brow was reached. Mendenhall drew the team under the wide spreading branches of the famous beeches, and stopped where a vast view of glorious rolling prairie opened before them to the West. Immediately below, the sparkling water of the winding Osage gleamed golden and green, as a snake wound about the brows of the charmer.

Barbara had recovered herself sufficiently to repel Mendenhall's insinuation, and cover to some extent the confusion she showed, by quickly begging him not to refer to that hideous and fearful occasion.

"Intense horror rendered me beside myself; what I looked I cannot imagine, and what I said, Colonel, ought to be forgotten, ought to be utterly forgotten! It was spoken in excitement, in agony, under the very compulsion of the awful moment; it cannot be right to remember it."

"Barbara," the Colonel replied, "before we leave this spot let us come to a perfect understanding. I have told you how much I love you, how I have no other thought than for you. For you, for you, for you! So my heart beats, my pulse flows, my breath comes and goes. But you do not believe me. There is doubt and distrust in all your looks. Happiness, neither yours nor mine, could ever live under that cloud; I mean to dispel it. It may be the wreck of my own life, it seems to be certainly so, but I want to prove to you the sincerity of all I have said, I want to show you, Barbara, that my love is real, is vital, is true. No mere selfish passion but such as to offer life itself for your sake."

Barbara was alarmed. For the moment she wondered what he meant. She so suspected him, that his words alone could hardly convince her of his sincerity.

"You think I am seeking only my own satisfaction, Barbara. I am not. I am seeking only that which will ensure yours. I have pressed my suit because out of the knowledge of my own love I am prophetic that your happiness ought to be with me; but you, and you alone are the one to be thought of. Barbara, I can never cease to be your friend, never. No change on your part will

turn me from my desire to serve you. I shall always be at your command, your willing champion at any need; but now and here I want to release you from a promise that is painful to you. That you may be absolutely your own again, free and unfettered by your pledge to me. Barbara, I return you your liberty, though it is with a breaking heart."

The Colonel held out his hand, and Barbara very solemnly took it. She could no longer doubt his sincerity. She only blamed herself for the evil motives she had imputed to him. Tears came to her eyes, as pressing his hand, she murmured, hardly audibly, "You are generous, very generous."

The Colonel smiled gently. He felt that by self-control and prudent diplomacy he had gained distinctly in Barbara's good will.

"I want to be more than generous," he cried, "I tell you, Barbara, there is nothing that affects you which does not equally interest me. And love quickens my perceptions. Let me be perfectly frank, and tell you at once that I know the reason for your indifference to me, the reason you have turned away from me. It is because someone else has come between us."

For a moment Barbara flushed deeply, fearing that he already divined the truth, but before she spoke Mendenhall continued, "I am not the man to stand back and yield my rights. I have too much the habit of succeeding. Any man who stands in my way must expect to be

crushed; and this man is already in my power. A single word and I can be rid of him."

"Colonel Mendenhall!" Barbara cried, "What folly are you talking? You seem to be supposing the most absurd situation. You have been good enough to release me from an obligation which was forced upon me, and which I resented, that I may have time to—to forget, and recover. But your added insinuations are nothing more than your own delusions."

"Barbara, you are not fair to me when I am offering you so much."

But Barbara was now too doubtful of Mendenhall, and too careful of Oliver, to betray her thoughts.

"Let us drive home," she implored. "There is nothing more to be said."

"Ah, Barbara, you do not trust me," he cried with fine effect of hurt affection. "I feel it. I know it. But you shall yet be convinced of my devotion. If you will not confide in me, at least you shall see that I am worthy of your confidence. Oliver Wentworth is in the most immediate and imminent danger; tomorrow night he is to be used to decoy Brown from his hiding place, and if he doesn't do it, if he leads our men astray, he will lose his own life."

A terrible chill settled upon Barbara's heart. She well knew that Oliver would unhesitatingly sacrifice himself before he would betray his friend. She trembled and turned white. Mendenhall, watching every sign of changing countenance, bent quickly towards her, took her

hand, and cried, "Barbara, I can save him! Say the word, tell me to do so, and I will!"

Barbara drew away her hand with feeble expostulation, and murmured faintly, "You say you are going to save him?"

"If you will," he responded. "But you must understand what it means. It is not simply protecting this fellow himself, but it is a question of sacrificing the whole plan of Brown's capture. I have to risk my honour, relinquish the success of my mission, and confess myself defeated at the very moment of triumph. Worse than that, I have to deceive my own men and fellow officers. I have to run the chance of disgrace and ruin. All that for you, Barbara, for you! If this man is worth saving in your eyes at this cost,—if your happiness rests upon it, tell me! Tell me, and it shall be done!"

"I wish you had spared yourself this revelation," Barbara stammered, biting her lips, but still unwilling to give Mendenhall the right to hold her heart in his power. "What has it to do with me? The best thing for Mr. Wentworth is to take his parole, then this scheme will be avoided."

"It is too late. In view of the urgent importance of this proposed capture of Brown the offer of parole is already withdrawn."

Again Barbara felt the thrill of terrible fear. She knew not what to do. To yield to Mendenhall, though his offer seemed generosity itself, was to plunge into unforeseen and direful consequences. She dimly guessed

that to accept his proffered help was to become a partner with him in a secret more dangerous than ever. Yet to refuse meant possible death to Oliver. Before that calamity her heart quailed, but at this moment impatience began to get the better of Mendenhall's resolve. New light gathered in his passionate eyes. The confession he so sought from Barbara's lips was in reality to be his prisoner's death warrant, and he yearned for it with the lover's hope of destroying his rival. He leaned toward her, his breath was hot upon her cheek. "Come, Barbara, come," he whispered, mingled passions making his voice sound strange. "Shall I save him, or will you let him go?"

Affrighted at Mendenhall's behaviour, Barbara seized the reins and in a moment caused the horses to spring forward, dashing into the homeward road, and descending the hill at dangerous speed.

The Colonel foreseeing disaster, turned his immediate attention to the horses. Leaning forward he caught the reins beyond Barbara's reach and succeeded in a few moments in bringing the excited animals to a more reasonable gait. But Barbara cried, "If you stop them I'll jump out. I am no longer your fiancée. I demand to be taken home instantly."

The Colonel was baffled. The scheme by which he was endeavouring to lead Barbara to trust him, to confide in him, and by which he was to appear in her eyes as confidential benefactor seemed already wrecked.

"You will regret this, Barbara!" he cried, almost savagely.

"I regret a great many things, Colonel Mendenhall, but never have I repented repelling an insult!"

"Insult? While I was offering, at my own risk and peril, to enable you to save my worst enemy, your traitorous, damnable Yankee friend?"

"Now you are insulting me with a vengeance," Barbara cried. "This not only ends our conversation, Colonel, but our friendship. Never speak to me again."

Thus anger rescued Barbara from fear and collapse. The Colonel vainly endeavoured to smooth matters over, but Barbara persisted in ignoring him. She refused to speak again, and when the parsonage was reached, sprang quickly from the buggy, and turning her back upon the chafing and enraged Colonel, went at once to her own room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE summer night fell softly over the village of Star Cross, merging the great trees in voluminous shadows, paling the brilliant blossoms, and steeping with distilled fragrance the silent spaces round about the garden plots and the vine-covered cottages. But there was no restfulness in the heart of Barbara Fairfax. She was tormented by uneasy thoughts. The skein of sensitive emotions, fluctuating hopes, and nervous fears, was inextricably tangled. In vain she attempted to free herself from all sense of responsibility, to flatter herself that now she was once more happily released from her odious bondage to Mendenhall, there was nothing to fret or distress her. That her old light-hearted girlish freedom must return. But it did not. She felt humiliated in her own eyes at her quarrel with the Colonel. Why had he dared to make such allusion to Oliver Wentworth. Had she publicly displayed an indelicate interest in this Northern stranger? If Mendenhall inferred such a thing, what had she done to have made it possible? The very thought set her to self declarations that her own regard for Oliver Wentworth was no more than ordinary human pity for his unfortunate position, as a stranger, friendless, and

imprisoned in an enemy's country. That it was beyond all reason to suppose he could ever be anything else to her. She had no detestation of the Yankees as some Southerners had, and from what she had recently seen, even the abolitionists were far from being despicable fanatics. She felt that they were inspired with high and noble ideals. But for all that, it was impossible she should ever forsake the South for the North. The lovely Southland of charm and sunshine for the uncouth North! There might be some wrong in some forms of slavery, but nowhere were a happier, more contented people than her own; nowhere were nobler men and women than Southerners. Nothing would ever take her away, and the suggestion that she should lose her heart to anyone but a Southerner, was utterly unreasonable. Angrily she put from her all further considerations affecting either Mendenhall or Mr. Wentworth. Was not tomorrow to be, indeed, a very gala day of enjoyment? Not only her father's fellow clergy, with their wives and daughters, but all the best people of the country, were to gather in the parsonage grounds. Church dignitaries, political leaders, and army officers would be there and she, Barbara, in a perfectly bewitching gown from Richmond, would be courted and admired to her heart's content. But no pictures of gaiety and conquest could obliterate the nervous fear which clung to her since her interview and quarrel with Mendenhall. Beneath her own sense of humiliation lay a more poignant regret. By her refusal to listen to the Colonel's proffered schemes, she had wil-

fully jeopardised Oliver's safety. That haunted her. No matter how, she told herself that the whole affair was beyond her control. In spite of every effort to suppress the thought of a personal regard for Oliver, she could not assuage the inexpressible pain at her heart when she fancied Mendenhall executing his threat, and driving Oliver to accept either dishonour or death. She well knew which he would choose.

The hours of the night went by like wounded creatures of the woods, drawing themselves in weariness and suffering towards the dawn. Regret, anger, indignation and fear, lacerated her heart. She could not bear the suspense of uncertainty, yet she would not yield to the humiliation of pride involved in any further acceptance of Mendenhall's friendship. Still deeper than all else, lay a sphere of feeling, inexplicable even to herself. Whether it was anguish or subtlest joy, all other thoughts, hopes and fears, dissolved into it, till her over-tasked heart broke in tears, and she sobbed herself to fitful slumbers like a tired child.

On the following day Barbara wore a less joyous look upon her always lovely face. But the deep shining of her dark eyes, the little hectic colour spot upon her cheeks beneath, rather heightened than disparaged the effect of her beauty. The compulsion of her effort to appear at ease, gave dignity, while inwardly suppressed anxiety, lent a tone of softly tremulous and troubled tenderness to her voice. Mendenhall's threatening words were still vividly in her mind, but she remembered, chiefly, with a

sense of respite and possible opportunity, that he had fixed the hour for "tomorrow night." Those words reiterated in her memory, "tomorrow night." She had then this one day before her, in which either to propitiate Mendenhall and save Oliver, or to turn away from both, and seek her own happiness regardless of the past excitement and distress.

The morning was one to allay all mental irritation and arouse the soul to tranquil enjoyment. It was such a day as no more Northerly latitude could rival. The sky was stained with an iridescent glow. The blazing rhododendron bushes, and the miles of catalpa blossom, already flooded with an ambient sunshine, threw a shimmering reflection of their beauty to the very heavens. The air, caressing in softest undulations the rounded heights of the emerald hills, drew noiselessly from meadows deep in nodding flowers, and broad pastures where drowsy cattle lay. The river wound in curves of dazzling light. Mixed perfumes of growing hemp, and flowering oleanders, wild mint, and deep moss, and the pungency of woodlands strung with grape vines in thick profusion of blossom, intoxicated the senses. It was fortunate for Mrs. Fairfax and the jovial rector that all preparations for the entertainment of the expected guests were well advanced, for the slaves were sympathetically drowsy as the day. The very songs were unuttered on their lips, even as the brilliant red birds and orioles were silent in the covert of the heavy shade trees.

As Dr. Fairfax stepped out upon the well rolled lawns,

it was evident that weeks of careful labour had been bestowed upon all details of the extensive grounds. The gravel paths showed a perfection of cleanliness and hard rolled finish. The edges of the flower beds ran in mathematical precision, and that luxuriance of rapid vegetation which gives to Southern gardens, in a few days, the appearance of long neglect, had been vigourously checked at all points.

The Doctor's genial countenance fairly beamed upon the perfect appearance of the grounds in which he took so much pride, and calling up old man Moses, he instructed him to see that the gardener and all the gardener's boys had a double portion of everything at the darkeys' quarters, when the evening feast, which was promised them, took place. Moses, who was privileged to use great freedom of speech in intercourse with his master, responded with high glee, " 'Fore de Lord, Massa Fairfax, 'twas not without reason dis ole nigger he use de 'Postle Paul razor when he shave Massa dis mornin'! I did come kind ob 'spectin' dey would be some jubous bad work here an' dar' on de part ob dese gardener boys, an' I mistrusted dat Massa would be in mighty need ob dat great Chapter ob second Corinphiums, wer' de mighty 'Postle do tell ob de won'arful forbearances ob de quality ob charity."

"You mistrusted without cause this time," the Doctor laughingly rejoined, "your personified razors are going to get you into trouble some day if you indulge in the fancy that you can forestall my awards and punishments.

Tomorrow you shall use Elijah, and I will call on the Lord of Hosts to consume with fire your false gods."

"I more likely to use de great David, for Massa he be equal to de best beloved of all de Kings ob Israel tomorrow, when dese boys had all dey can eat. Dat am de truth, far as all your pore nigger boys does substantiate it."

The good rector had some solid arguments for his thorough going support of the institutions of the South, for in his own experience, there was a beautiful community of interests, an affectionate relationship, and a watchful regard for the good of every member, which contrasted advantageously with the isolated individualism of the Northerners' methods of ceaseless competition.

"Go along, Moses, there's a deal to be done yet. See that the carriage house is swept again after Sambo finishes the decorations Miss Barbara is arranging. And Moses, be sure and see that candles are in all the lanterns for it's likely to be dark tonight and some of the guests may not go home too early."

Before long the village children were rewarded for their patient watchfulness by seeing many carriages pass along the street and ascend the shaded hill to the parsonage. To the clergy all respectfully doffed their caps, the popular politicians were cheered, but the favourites in the eyes of the village youngsters, as not infrequently to maturer fancy, were those who wore the ribbon, or the star, or the simple band round the hat, which stood for

the insignia of one or another of the local military organizations. But when Colonel Mendenhall rode up the street, in company with Colonel Buford, both in full dress uniform of Virginia State Guard, they received an ovation of shouts and cheers.

Mendenhall, who over night regretted his quick-tempered irritation with Barbara, had recovered his usual determination not to be defeated by any trifling details. If Barbara would not yield him the advantage of her secret confidence, it was still just as possible to proceed with the plan by which he intended her to believe him the benefactor of Wentworth for her sake. Then, after the Yankee, by an unforeseen accident, was safely disposed of, Barbara would be compelled to feel more generously toward the man who, instead of exerting his power to crush his rival, had preferred the unselfish service of his lady's desires. It was a diplomatic and pretty conception, and he had already arranged for its execution. Captain Buckskin Bill was to be relied upon for carrying out his instructions. Mendenhall not only knew enough to appreciate a subordinate who could be depended upon to do the part assigned to him without hesitation or undue questioning, but he also wisely refrained from allowing any of the participants in his plans to understand more than their own share in whatever might be the ultimate ends desired. Consequently Colonel Buford, who was just as eager to effect the capture of the famous John Brown as was Mendenhall, had no conception that the sacrifice of Wentworth was to Men-

denhall an essential part of the undertaking. In truth Buford, who was the very soul of honour and chivalry, fearless fighter, and outspoken friend, was no diplomatist. He never looked for further motive than the most apparent immediate object. Had he even suspected Mendenhall's ulterior design in using Oliver to draw out Brown, to say nothing of his secret orders to Buckskin Bill, Buford would have declined to co-operate. At the present moment, however, Colonel Buford was not particularly concerned either with thoughts of the Kansas campaign, or the block house prisoner. He was preeminently occupied with a personal affair of his own. For some little time, he had been nervously pulling down the curled tips of his rather thin moustache and biting at them in restless abstraction. Now he threw up his head suddenly and turning to his companion, exclaimed, "Dash it, Mendenhall, I've got to have this thing out with you, I——" and there he hesitated, dragged at the bridle and set his horse prancing.

Mendenhall stared curiously. He could not imagine what possible subject thus disturbed his usually outspoken and transparent friend. "I say," Buford continued, gathering himself together again. "I can't stand the suspense."

"Well, what in the name of Satan is it?" snapped Mendenhall, half amused, half impatient at the verbal timidity of the younger man.

"It's just this, Jeff. I want to know if there's anything between you and—and Miss Fairfax?"

"The thunder you do!" Mendenhall responded like a bolt. With an intimation in his voice that his friend was venturing upon a topic imminently dangerous.

"Yes, I do," Buford retorted with a return of his usual directness. "Jeff, you know me well enough, and you know I don't run after the women, but this time I'm caught. I'm fairly caught. I can't hold out against it. Of course, I know there's no chance for me if you are in it. But what I mean is, if you care for her, if you have any understanding, old boy, why—— Damn it! I mean I'll go home now."

In spite of an undercurrent of anger that his own dissevered tie to Barbara should be thus forcibly brought to mind, Mendenhall could not refrain from a passing laugh at Buford's boyish confession. At first it was on his tongue to send him off with a prompt declaration that the girl was already his own promised bride, but on second thought, he foresaw his own need of Buford's assistance, so he told the truth instead, at least, so much as to convince Buford there could be no infringement of the honourable etiquette of friendship in his remaining and offering himself as a still hopeful suitor in the lists of Barbara's admirers.

"By the way, Buford," Mendenhall continued, "I have serious reason to expect that before we can put our plan for drawing out Brown into execution, the principal factor in it, the prisoner, Wentworth, here, will make a determined effort to escape. Indeed, the reports I have had make it pretty clear that some sort of plot has been

hatched out already, by which it is expected to take him out of the block house tonight about midnight and slip him through the parsonage grounds, down to the saw mill yards, where a boat will be in hiding, and horses across the river. Are you willing to watch the yards with enough men to cover the ground from the ford down?"

"All right, Jeff, but why not cover the stream for a mile or so above, as well as below the main ford. I've noticed the bend of the river and the way the timber runs make a half mile higher up stream the likeliest place for concealment."

"Your head's level, Buford. I've got that section already arranged for, with Bill and his posse."

The two men now found themselves at the parsonage, and, turning their horses over to Sambo, they were immediately ushered into reception rooms, where Dr. and Mrs. Fairfax were greeting the gathering guests. Colonel Mendenhall, who was a favourite both with the doctor and his wife, was quickly caught in a tangle of new introductions, spun deftly about him by Mrs. Fairfax, who had been saving several obligations to distant connections to be paid by the distinction of an introduction to the Virginian Colonel. Meanwhile Buford, stopping only for the essential words of polite greeting to those whom necessity compelled him to recognise, moved about eagerly hoping to discover Barbara, having determined, since his conversation with Mendenhall, that he would lose not a moment in pressing his own suit.

Barbara, however, was by no means to be monopolised

for any individual demands. She was attending faithfully to her share of the entertainment of the guests. Flitting hither and thither, from the broad verandas to the seats and benches, skillfully placed in the shaded borders of the open lawns, she saw that people were disposed in the most harmonious groups, that parish enmities were not aroused, that well known county feuds should not be fomented by the ill assortment of malice-bearing individuals with tattling ones. She kept the smart little page boys trotting from point to point with their tempting trays of iced drinks, and savoury cakes. Buford found his only opportunity, for the present, was to make one more in the circle of smitten curates who followed her about offering a Babel of foolish suggestions with an air of extreme wisdom. This proved so intensely irritating to the eager, though bashful Buford, that presently he drew off with what might pass for threatening haste, but that it was difficult for his dapper little figure and short legs to compass any real dignity of offended pride.

Retreating to the welcome concealment of a considerable bank of rhododendrons and laurel, where an unoccupied seat tempted him, he threw himself down, tore out his cigarette case, and muttering a rapid string of soothing expletives, blew forth such a terrific succession of vehement puffs, that the white filmy smoke soon wreathed his red face, and stood in a vapourous cloud over his head. A soft rustling of leaves, which did not attract Colonel Buford's notice in his present absorption, was followed by a quick, croaking laugh, and Master Phil's over-sized

head and brilliant eyes, appeared, peering through the bars of the rustic seat.

"That was a mighty pretty line of adjectives. I wish you'd teach 'em to me," he cried.

"Served you right for prying and eavesdropping, you young monkey." The Colonel was not sorry for the interruption, for he hated solitude, and in this instance was eager to gain the co-operation of Barbara's brother.

"Say," Phil continued, creeping awkwardly out, and poising himself on his crutches, "some of those swears were brand new. Never heard 'em. Where've you been to school?"

"The back end of camp life in 'old Missip' bottoms, when the wet season's on, and the swag and the mess larder have run down to coffee grounds and mush. When the mail cart's ditched forty miles away, and the yellow death's just making the very doctors turn sick."

"Gol' losh! You've had a college course."

"Well, it's some consolation to know the thing so's to make it practically useful in emergencies."

"I saw you come in here like old scratch was after you, 'What in Gimini's up with Buford,' I says to myself, when all at once you flops down on this seat, and the air turns blue for five minutes."

"Do you make a profession of hiding around to spy out other people's business?" Buford queried, with some sharpness, for that was a trait, especially in a boy, which he considered utterly hope-destroying.

"Not a profession," Phil retorted, quite unabashed, "an amusement."

Colonel Buford would have administered a direct and earnest reproof to Phil for such a practice had the boy given him the least opportunity, but Phil took the conversation in his own hands. He told the Colonel that no moral arguments were applicable to his case, that he knew more about religious beliefs, and heathen as well as civilized faiths, than his father, the rector, did. That all the humdrum rules of polite society were perfectly familiar to him, but that he had long ago seen through them all as mere superficial makeshifts, that he was independent of everybody's recommendations or instruction, he knew more than anybody could tell him, and Buford could occupy his time to much better advantage in seeking advice from Phil than in criticising his method.

"I'm willing to bet you a couple of fivers, old man, or more if you say so," he went on, "that I can give you some valuable advice on the situation of your own affairs. I'll bet you I know the secret orders you've had since last night."

"I don't see how you can, for I've had none."

"That's all right, of course you won't give them away, but take my bet, Colonel, and I will tell you what they were."

"It looks to me as if you were crazy! Keep your money and don't act the fool. When I say I have had no secret orders, that's what I mean."

"Do you mean to tell me that Mendenhall has not given you particular instructions for tonight?"

"Oh," said Buford, suddenly remembering that he had a few hours ago promised to take special guard duty, "are you hinting at anything you know about the Yankee prisoner?"

"I'm not hinting anything. I'm proposing a bet on knowing more than you think I do. Will you take it?"

"Not I, you little hot head. I don't care to share your doubtful wisdom."

"Well, I'll tell you anyhow," cried the little cripple, whose chief desire was ever to shine as a wonder of shrewdness and smartness in the eyes of his listeners, "Mendenhall's made up his mind at last, after I've warned him a dozen times, that the prisoner is d—d dangerous. It would be fool's work to let him live, when we're sure of him now, so he's to be played off tonight in a pretty little drama of bogus escape, led into ambush and scotched. Now how in thunder do you suppose I could find that out? Ain't it a close secret? And you and Mendenhall think you have it between you, eh?"

Buford scanned the face of the quick-witted little fellow with stern inquiry, but he did not detect any apparent insincerity.

Then he advised the boy not to suppose he knew anything about it, for there was no grain of truth in such a scheme as he supposed. At which Phil flared up in emphatic assertion that Buford need not try to throw him off, he could not do it. "I know the whole business," he

cried. "I know where you are stationed, and just what Mendenhall told you. "He is not to be taken again, no words and no escape, but a quick finish."

Buford, who now supposed the youngster was merely giving rein to his imagination for his own amusement, laughed carelessly and began another raid upon the cigarette case, with the intention of turning the conversation and nerving himself to make some direct enquiry from Phil as to Barbara's inclinations.

At that moment footsteps attracting Phil's quick perceptions, he cried out to Buford, "You hold on a minute, here's what I was looking for." With extraordinary rapidity the little fellow swung himself with dexterous movements of his crutches into the shadow of an overhanging bough. Catching a few twigs above him he concealed himself so that, although within arm's length of the open path, he was well hidden from the eyes of anyone passing. As he thus disappeared Toffy Moses came round the corner of the path. His long arms swung with loose freedom as he shuffled at his usual half ambling gait, with the ease and deceptive speed of a trotting coyote. He carried a folded scrap of paper in his right hand. Colonel Buford did not consider Phil's talk sufficiently serious to arouse his own interest; buried in anxious thoughts of Barbara he was inclined to pay no attention to any other topic. While a cloud of fragrant smoke played over him wreathing fantastically in the light air, he watched Phil's manœuvre, and Toffy's approach with indifference. As the slave boy drew near, he raised his hand to his cap

respectfully, and at the same moment there flashed from beneath the laurel leaves, the iron ferruled crutch of Master Phil, descending upon Toffy's lifted arm. With a yell of mingled fright and pain Toffy dropped the message he was carrying. The end of the crutch fell swiftly upon the folded paper, and while Toffy was leaping across the path to seek the protection of the Colonel from his unseen foe, Phil drew the scrap of paper within reach and was immediately master of its contents. In a moment more, and before Toffy realised what was the nature of the sudden attack upon himself, Phil exclaimed, "By the sword of Achilles, here's mischief! What in the realms of treachery does this mean? Colonel Buford, don't you play off you know more than I do. I tell you, you can't trust your own brother, to say nothing of sisters, they're born plotters anyhow, being women. But, just look here, will you. What do you make of this?"

Toffy, who, seeing Master Phil, at once understood that he had been trapped into betraying a message from Colonel Mendenhall to his mistress, which, whatever its import, was sure to be put to some evil purpose by Master Phil, now rushed forward, his great eyes flaming. His emotion was so sudden and overpowering, however, that the words he vainly endeavoured to speak, gathered into choking gasps, unintelligible as ludicrous.

Buford called out, "Phil you're a little demon. Give the boy his message and let him go. Hang such methods of spying into other folks' affairs."

"All right," Phil responded, "if you don't want to see

it, you needn't. Shut up, Toffy!" as the young negro began to threaten vengeance upon his tormentor in more definite terms, "Shut up, I tell you or—— Look here you frowsly little wool-head, do you suppose I'm going to prevent you taking your clandestine love messages, eh? Not a bit of it. Here it is, take it, take it, I say, and get, as fast as you know how, but if you are going to run Mendenhall's errands, let me tell you to be more careful and not show them around to everyone you happen to meet." And with a cunning laugh, Phil threw him the note and turned to Colonel Buford.

Phil's allusion to love-making had touched the sensitive young Colonel at his only vulnerable spot, and he regarded Phil with an anxious interest he could not suppress. Still he tried to cover it in the very real feeling of disgust which Phil's tricky dishonourable ways provoked.

"You ought to know better," he cried. "It's a blackguard's game, not a gentleman's, to stop messengers and read other people's letters."

"Didn't I tell you I'm not one of you! What do you know about me? I'm a free lance. I do as I like and you can't preach to me, so don't try. But look here, isn't this a pretty scheme? Mendenhall——"

"Don't tell me," interrupted Buford, although in truth he was distressed enough to think that Mendenhall was in secret communication with Barbara, and would have given much to have known, by fair means, what was the nature of their intercourse. "Don't make me a sharer in

your trickery. I prefer some other part than that of prying into my friend's love affairs."

"Love affairs," laughed Phil. "That was just to keep the wool over Toffy's eyes. This ain't love. It's war."

Buford hardly knew whether to feel relieved or angered, but Phil continued, "What the saints do you suppose he means by this move? It looks to me like a double plot, Buford. I believe Mendenhall has bluffed you and everyone else."

"Your wit's too much for your judgment, Phil," cried Buford, rising. "Mendenhall is beyond your criticism. He is my friend and has my confidence. You had better leave his affairs alone, and go and try to be agreeable if you can, to your father's guests."

"The guests be blessed. I'm into this scheme and I'll see it through. If you didn't have those orders from Mendenhall then some one else did, and you are being used to run the cat up the other tree. I see it. It's all clear. Mendenhall tells Babbie how to help the Yankee prisoner to escape. That pleases her, don't you see, just what she wants, but it's a trap just the same, and Wentworth walks into the noose, eh?"

Buford, finding no way to suppress the determined young schemer, shrugged his shoulders and walked off, throwing a last assurance at Phil that he would only bring trouble upon himself if he continued his absurd speculations.

CHAPTER XIX

AS evening folded the golden glory of the hot summer afternoon in soft diffusive shade, as soothing to the spirit as to the eye surfeited with light, Barbara left the dancers, in the gaily illuminated carriage house, and bent her steps toward the tulip tree in that part of the parsonage grounds where the block house prisoner was accustomed to take his evening exercise.

Agitated by the receipt of Mendenhall's message she had insufficiently weighed its meaning, and now being at last alone, re-read it with greater care.

"I am determined not to let your displeasure, or my own hasty temper, alter my resolve to sink everything in the one purpose of serving you. I am ready to make the sacrifice as I told you. Our prisoner's fate is sealed tonight. Choose whether or not you will save him. If he returns to the block house after his evening exercise I shall understand that you care nothing about it. If, however, you wish to save him, let him escape tonight, by the bend of the river above the ford. I shall see that this spot is not guarded."

Barbara, impressed by the directness and evident sincerity of these words felt, as upon their first perusal, that

there was only one course open to her. She must urge Oliver to escape without a moment's delay.

No sooner did she gain the corner of the winding path which opened upon the usual walk taken by the prisoner, than Oliver appeared. His hearty salutation, and the bright gleam of his friendly eyes, told Barbara at once that he was in a mood more likely to listen to her suggestions than at their previous conferences.

The recollection of her own release from the pledge to Mendenhall tended to give a sense of greater freedom in her greeting to Oliver, and so they met with smiling cordiality on both sides.

Oliver opened the conversation with hasty exclamations of his delight and good fortune in this unexpected opportunity of seeing Miss Fairfax, for he had supposed the occasion of so many guests at the house would not have allowed her even a passing moment's respite. In the simple pleasure of seeing Oliver restored to high spirits and animation, Barbara momentarily forgot the immediate object of her seeking him, and responded with laughing and childlike gaiety. She admitted that the duties of trying to entertain so many of her father's guests were arduous, and drew humourous pictures of some of the most picturesque of the countryside visitors, the lanky, yet devoted poverty-ridge minister in home-dyed frock coat, and no vest, the eloquent revivalist preacher in an extraordinary costume of plaited strips of doe skin, who was said at one time to have converted a school house full of cowboys by a masterful and unexpected use of his

six shooter. She gave piquant illustrations of the peculiar conversation of some of the young men, who, in over-anxiety to please, revealed a vivid capacity for strong epithets, and spicy similes, with a sublime ignorance of grammar and etiquette, and of young women whose last resource seemed to lie in hysterical giggling, till Oliver also forgot any further purpose than to enjoy to the full the happy intercourse thus accidentally vouchsafed him.

Suddenly, however, Barbara recalled herself to the situation. The smile vanished from her glowing face. Her joyousness fell before a fear that seized her like a sudden grip of pain. The bright eyes, looking into hers, the noble countenance, the glow of youth and joy, and happiness, strong in his voice and bearing, emphasised only the danger which beset him. Oliver noted, with alarm, the quick change of expression, the sudden quenching of her vivacity, but, to his hurried questions, she first shook her head, and then with pathetic pleading, which went to Oliver's heart like the cry of a child hurt in the midst of its innocent play, she begged him to listen once more to the advice regarding his own position and the course he was taking, which, as she had already warned him, he ought to heed.

"I will do anything you wish," he cried, not vehemently as he had before assured her of his intention to do only that which duty seemed to demand, but softly, soothingly, with the tenderness of a lover.

The stars were coming out in the purple vastness of the clear heavens above, a deep silence fell between them, to

each so full of unspoken, of hardly imagined desires, that it held them both in marveling suspense.

The girl's more sensitive nature, in fear of the outcome, was first to dispel the magic charm.

"You know what I wish," she said gently, "that you will no longer contend against us, against my people, against the South, but," she began to speak more rapidly, with rising excitement, "you are your own judge, believe as you will. I only urge you to take immediate steps to secure your own safety by leaving Star Cross."

Oliver was surprised. It had seemed before to be Barbara's chief desire to rid the South of an enemy. Now she seemed rather desirous of saving the life of one.

"I have no longer the opportunity," he replied. "I am to accompany Colonel Mendenhall and his men tomorrow into Kansas; the offer of a pardon is canceled."

"I know it," answered Barbara, "but there remains the opportunity of escape."

"And you—you would aid me to that?" Oliver queried.

"Most heartily I will," she cried, "indeed I came here for no other purpose. It is very urgent that you should lose no time. It must be tonight, and——"

Barbara spoke with evident emotion, mingling pleasure in the service she was enabled to render with sorrow at the realised parting. "You must not return to the block house."

"But I am watched and tonight especially, every avenue of escape is doubly guarded.

"One is left open," Barbara answered.

"Where?" he cried eagerly. "Tell me by what possible path I can once slip through the toils of this imprisonment that is wearing my soul out, and I will risk everything for another breath of freedom."

Barbara, while her heart beat in sympathy with his yearning desire, felt a stab of regret at the readiness he showed to forget her. Alas, how little she was to him in the happiness or larger purpose of his life!

"The old ford, not ours at the foot of the hill, but the one above at the bend of the river."

It was Oliver's turn to change colour. Sudden astonishment seized him. The horrible suspicion which Barbara's bewitching presence had driven from his mind returned. Must he believe that in spite of all her graciousness and apparent sincerity, she was capable of luring his confidence only to betray him? Yet, the ford at the bend! Mammy Mine had distinctly warned him that Buckskin Bill was to be there tonight expecting him. He was cautioned to make no attempt in that direction, as it would mean certain death. Was this the scheme by which he was to be trapped? And was Barbara Fairfax —but the thought was madness! The blood rushed to his temples! He hated himself for doubting her, and yet the inference seemed inevitable.

While he remained blankly silent, Barbara innocently repeated her assurance that there were reasons why he ought to lose no time.

Oliver, unable in the darkness to read any betrayal of insincerity in her face, and driven with distracting sus-

picions, repeated, clumsily her directions, "The old ford, you say, above the bend?"

"Yes, I promise you that you can there pass without fear of recapture."

At that moment the thrill of music from the orchestra as the dancing was resumed, swept out over the banks of foliage and blossom. The sound suddenly moved Oliver to a blind exhilaration.

"Before I go," he cried, "grant me one wild and foolish thing. For the sake of all that might have been, were it not for events greater than ourselves, give me the joy of one dance."

Whether Barbara felt more inclined to laugh or to sob, no words betrayed. She mutely raised her hand to his arm, and, thus guiding him, began to retrace her steps toward the carriage house.

The entrance draped in festoons of long grasses, and arched with drooping boughs, was crowded with guests watching the dancing. It was not difficult for Barbara to pass by a screen of fern palms without attracting attention. The floor was crowded with dancers. In the blaze of artificial light, the colour, and the music, she shared Oliver's half-wild delight in the rashness and unexpectedness of their conduct. The dance was a new waltz of quicker time than had hitherto been customary. In a moment they had swung into the brilliant light, and joined the swinging circle of bright faces and throbbing hearts.

It so chanced that Mendenhall and Buford stood to-

gether, Buford having sought out his brother officer, hoping to find Barbara there.

"By the gods!" Buford suddenly exclaimed. "Look there, Mendenhall!"

As Mendenhall's eyes, turning in the direction pointed out, came upon Barbara, radiantly happy in the rush of the rapid dance, and saw the strange costume of her partner, a quick flash of something like devilish rage gleamed upon his face. But controlling himself with masterly tact he said lightly, "It's the condemned's choice of his last meal, and as to Miss Fairfax, she has the right to grant favours to whom she will."

In truth, Mendenhall surmised pretty accurately what had happened. And feeling sure that Barbara would quickly dismiss the New Englander to his doom, he felt no real alarm. Barbara stopped before the music ceased, to avoid the notice of the other dancers, and slipped with her partner through the palms to the darkness without, almost as unobserved as upon their entrance.

Panting, she cried to him hurriedly, "Do not delay a moment. Go now! I must not be away or something may be suspected. Goodbye."

Oliver was on the point of crying out passionately. His brain was in a ferment. The close presence of the girl fired his soul with unimaginable joy. But Barbara was gone.

For a moment he stood, trying to recall himself to the reality of the situation. Presently he cried to himself,

"It is impossible. I will trust her. The old ford above the bend."

When Barbara re-entered the room Mendenhall was immediately at her side. He was excited, and with all his effort he could not conceal it. He spoke with humility, and the greatest courtesy, assuring Barbara of his devotion and willingness to serve her to the utmost, but she detected a tone of something that seemed like exultation in his utterance, and felt, rather than observed, a suggestion of insincerity. He very soon excused himself and left the room.

As he moved away Barbara's thought reverted to Oliver. Had she seen him for the last time? The thought was unbearable. Yet it was beyond reason to suppose otherwise. Still she had sent him to life, at least, rather than the inevitable result which, according to Mendenhall, would have followed his remaining. He was now on his way to freedom; he would return to the East when this temporary border disturbance was over, as it surely would be in the immediate future. And then there was still a hope. But where was he now? Was it certain that after all he could get away? Mendenhall had promised her, and she felt with sickening dread that she would be compelled to pay his price. But he dare not deceive her now, of that she felt convinced. Still some accident, some wrong turn on the part of Oliver, and in a moment all might be over!

Buford was at her elbow stammering a nervous request for the pleasure of a dance.

He was amazed, indeed, when she turned suddenly upon him, took his arm and hurried him from the room.

She knew that in the bosom of this little Virginian Colonel there beat a heart as perfectly chivalrous and true as that of any hero in the annals of history. He was, in all save stature, the type of the Southern gentleman she had learned from her earliest years to regard as the bravest, most honourable of men. In her sudden dilemma, distrust of herself, and fear of Mendenhall she turned to Buford for counsel and help. The young officer, at first overwhelmed with astonishment and then enraptured with delight, as he began to realise that Barbara was taking him into her confidence, no sooner discovered that there was real service to be rendered, than all his faculties rallied to immediate action.

"It is monstrous," he cried, "I can only believe there has been some confounded blunder. Or at least Mendenhall has not——Where is he? Did you leave him in the hall?"

"No, a few minutes ago he went out. I think that alarmed me. His face, his expression were so unusual."

"Gone! Then Miss Fairfax, I must follow. I pray to heaven there may be some explanation of this different to anything you suspect."

Barbara held him a moment longer. "It is very, very good of you, Colonel Buford. I hardly know what I am asking you to do. I fear the consequences, but——"

Buford, however, would listen to no apologies, it was the proudest opportunity of his life, to be trusted by her,

and with eager words of encouragement he left her to hasten after Mendenhall.

Mendenhall, perfectly satisfied that his subordinates at the ford would carry out their instructions to the letter, went only as far as the outlet from the parsonage grounds, with the intention of diverting any possible guests or servants who might be returning by that road, and Buford found him standing sentry there.

"Don't waste time challenging me," Buford cried, as Mendenhall passed the usual enquiries in the darkness, "I recognise you all right. I'm on a hot trail. It's just as I figured out, the prisoner has headed for the old ford. We have him a few minutes ahead of us."

"You're mistaken," Mendenhall replied indifferently, "I've had a guard out here whom I have but this moment relieved, and no one has passed. Try back Buford, onto your own section, he may be giving you the slip."

Mendenhall had no reason to suppose that his friend Buford had any other motive than the prevention of the prisoner's escape, or any reason to doubt the truth of his own statement, he was not, therefore, prepared for Buford's next move, which was to dart beyond Mendenhall's reach, dive through the bushes, and run at his utmost speed along the road beyond.

"Are you crazy?" Mendenhall yelled after him. "Stop and hear what I have to say."

But Buford paid no heed, and Mendenhall set after him. It was a wild run in the darkness, and perhaps fortunate for Buford that Mendenhall's longer legs enabled him

to gain on the younger man so that the two came almost at once upon Buckskin Bill's party, for Mendenhall's voice abusing the insane obstinacy of his fellow officer, warned them in time, or Buford might have inadvertently met the fate prepared for Oliver Wentworth. When they recovered breath they were equally surprised to find that the prisoner had not been seen. Mendenhall hid his chagrin in ridicule of Buford's false alarm, while Buford was careful not to disclose the real nature of his surprise, and comforted himself with the assurance that, after all, there had been some absurd blunder, and that he would be freed from the necessity of doubting the perfect sincerity and honourable conduct of his friend.

A mounted patrol was despatched along the line of guard, and presently returned with the report that no attempt at escape had been made anywhere.

Mendenhall and Buford then started towards the parsonage, sending a messenger before them to communicate with the sentry at the block house. The messenger returning, met the two Colonels as they were about to re-enter the gaily lighted carriage house, and reported that the prisoner had duly returned at the regular hour, and was now safely secured as usual for the night.

Buford ejaculated a well satisfied comment, while Mendenhall swore inaudibly and bit his lips.

When Oliver left Barbara on the rash attempt at escape, he had perfectly determined to go on, but watched by Toffy Moses, he was intercepted before leaving the parsonage grounds, and such accurate information given him

of the men who were waiting his approach at the bend of the river, and the very nature of their orders, that with sick heart he sullenly returned to the block house, more angry with himself for being compelled to doubt Barbara's purpose than with her for attempting to betray him.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Barbara heard from Colonel Buford that her alarm had been unnecessary, for the prisoner had quietly returned, she felt a quick relief, that freed the painful beating of her heart. Immediately, however, her anxiety was renewed, and she was baffled by perplexity as she vainly endeavoured to solve the mystery of why Oliver, after having left her with the acknowledged intention of effecting his escape, should have halted in its execution. She recalled that he had behaved strangely at the moment of her urging him to go. Did he already know more of Mendenhall's real designs than she did? Had he then only humoured her, pleased himself at her expense, believing her to be merely playing into Colonel Mendenhall's hands, and willing to do so even to bartering lives? The thought irritated and maddened Barbara to such an extent that she inwardly determined to avoid every possible chance of seeing either Mendenhall or Wentworth again. She had been insolently treated by both. Both had worked upon her deepest emotions, had influenced and affected her very life, and both had shamefully abused their opportunities. She would henceforth ignore them equally, and compel coming events to lead her in paths absolutely

apart from theirs. She turned impulsively to the chivalric little Buford, who, flattered and delighted beyond his wildest expectations, received her favour with admirable presence of mind, and made the most of it in a way that encouraged Barbara to believe she might indeed find gratification and contentment to an exceptional degree were she willing to confide the whole of her life to the guardianship of this trusty, simple-hearted little man. But, though Oliver was in no position to resist or oppose Barbara's decision regarding her conduct towards him, Mendenhall was not so easily disposed of. Wretched and miserable as Barbara felt at heart, though she assumed a certain gaiety, it almost frenzied her to be followed about the ball room by Mendenhall, determined to wrest from her an explanation of her failure to follow his counsel in setting the prisoner free. For some time Barbara successfully avoided him, but his temper was rising to a pertinacity that was ready to force an issue, and presently Barbara found he had outwitted Buford far enough to bring her to bay in a tête-à-tête behind a screen of potted plants and swinging baskets of flowers.

"Then you mean me to believe that our New England prisoner's life has no value in your estimation?" he asked insistently, actually barring Barbara into her seat in the corner.

"Please let me out, you are exactly in my way Colonel," she answered quickly.

"But," he persisted, "Miss Fairfax, this is a serious matter. You must realise that I warned you of the con-

sequences of allowing Wentworth to return to the block house."

"I will not be compelled, sir, to answer questions which I have surely sufficiently shown I had no desire to hear. Please recall your manners, if only for so long as to allow me to leave you."

"Barbara," Mendenhall cried, growing almost uncontrollably enraged, "you will regret thus abusing my confidence. I am offering everything as your friend, but if you treat me like this——"

"I care not in what relationship you stand to me. You may act as you choose; do your worst towards whom you will; I will have none of your affairs on my hands, and no false protection that either comes or pretends to come from your good will."

Mendenhall's anger was now fairly equaled by Barbara's own. She rose, although he stood almost over her, and at the same moment Colonel Buford returned, with an exclamation that the business on which Colonel Mendenhall had urgently besought him to go was happily despatched. Mendenhall was thus forced to give way, and in a moment more Barbara was hurrying with Buford into a new dance.

Before the night of gaiety had worn away, and while some of the slowly departing guests were still saying their farewells, Barbara had so far repented of her hasty aggravation towards Oliver, feeling that he had not only no opportunity to defend himself, but none to make any explanation of his behaviour, that she was oppressed with

the fear of what might befall him on the morrow, and at last bound Colonel Buford by a solemn promise that he would at least make some pretext which should delay the proposed raid into Kansas, even though he might not be able to prevent its eventual occurrence.

It happened, therefore, on the following morning that the expedition did not start, but that a postponement for one day was agreed upon. Mendenhall openly fretted at the delay, while Buford was obliged to appear deeply busied in necessary preparations. The prisoner indeed was well satisfied, especially as he was given extra hours of exercise to fit him, at Buford's suggestion, for more violent exertion the following day. Enjoying this unwonted freedom, Oliver extended his walk through the parsonage garden till he found himself at a little gate in the thick osage orange hedge which surrounded the inner grounds. Outside was a strip of sandy soil on which the rector raised his finest strawberries, and a dozen slaves were picking berries under the easy oversight of old man Moses, their black faces, bobbing under the red bandanas upon their heads, the crimson heaps of fruit in broad flat baskets in their hands, the deep green background of luxurious vines, the motionless trees along the river bank, the air above filled as a shrine on holy day with golden light, held Oliver's admiring attention.

Old Moses was seated under a towering growth of Juba bush, the panicles of delicate white blossom, bent in the heat, fringing his heavy head. As he looked up and

saw Oliver at the gate a bright light kindled in his dusky eyes, and he called out:

"Massa find de coolest shade right hyar, in de Juba-bushes," at the same time shifting his own position to make the most comfortable place available.

"You're not a hard overseer, are you, Moses?" Oliver said, nodding his head to the chattering and grinning berry pickers, who, noticing 'the friend of the poor slave,' as they called Oliver, showed their shining teeth and rolled their eyes in sympathetic unison.

"Plenty time, Marse Wentworth, plenty time. Dis hyar ain't no plantation. Dis am de garden ob de house ob God! See up dar, yonder, de big cross, an de shining star in de middle ob him! Hi! You nigger Theophilus! You come an' bring right hyar a dish ob de biggest berries in de patch for Marse Wentworth! You hear me?" Theophilus, who was at the end of the first row of pickers, grinned joyously, as he passed along behind the kneeling figures, each contributing the choicest specimens from their baskets, and Oliver soon had before him a luscious feast.

"If all slavery were like this," Oliver commented, yielding to the delight of the picture before him, the drowsiness of the hot air, the delicious perfume of the ripe fruit, and the gentle murmurous voices of the workers.

"De mercy ob heaven, Marse Wentworth, dis ain't slavery!" Moses responded gloomily. "Dis am de embroidery on de top ob de cloth. You'se got to hab de makin' ob de cloth most part ob de time. We uns hyar,

in this parts, are on de edge ob salvation, we most next to freed men, 'cept once in a while we gets a bit o' whippin', but dey don't drive us uns, dey don't chain us, dey don't starve an' sell us away, like de plantation Massa do! You go down de river, Marse, you take across de cotton fields, an' den your heart be quick filled with de anger ob de coming wrath! What hab de pore nigger, down thar? Toil, toil, toil, a massa, an' de lash! Dat am de pore crittur's catalog' ob blessin's. De strong men, dey most harden up to it, like dey was mule beasts, de older dey be, de less dey feels. But de women folks, dey don't 'low to harden up so. De more sufferin' in de day de more sobbin' in de night. Dey's born sobbers, is de pore women folk! Sufferin' an' sobbin' in 'dere soft silent souls! Sufferin' an' sobbin' an' prayin', till de heart break come, den de plug am snatch away out'n de bar'l, an' de weary spirit passes ober Jordan in de bubbles." The old man was feeble, and the tears gathered in his eyes, at the sad memory of horrid scenes once indeed but too familiar in his own life. The workers in the field had turned, and were now slowly moving down again toward the river, their voices melodiously blending in the dirge-like refrain:

"My poor body lies a' mouldering in the grave,
My poor body lies a' mouldering in the grave,
My poor body lies a' mouldering in the grave,
While my soul goes marching on!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
My soul goes marching on!"

Oliver felt a painful sense of oppression, as though he were overcome by the heat, he pulled open his collar and threw his head back. He reproached himself for his enforced idleness. Was he destined to lose every opportunity of being of real service to the cause of freedom, of John Brown's call to action, of simple justice to common humanity in the name of Almighty God!

While he meditated, old Moses told dolefully of sorrows that in his prophetic mind were now brewing. His own people, the negroes themselves, in his opinion, were losing courage. So many abortive efforts utterly failing to bring relief, had disheartened them. And it seemed to him, that even religion was less sustaining to them than in his younger days.

"Sure, de young niggers, now 'days, dey don't feel de mighty power ob de Lord upon 'em. Dey don't say, 'De Lord am my strength, an' my salvation, de Lord will bring my soul out ob hell.'" Then he said, suddenly, looking furtively about, "Don' you hear tell, my boy Early's be'n in hyar, from de camp ob de blessed Captn. John Brown?"

"What!" cried Oliver, instantly alert. "Came in here?"

"Hist! hist! He steal in, for to see his ol' mammy, an' for to make sure you's hyar, Marse Wentworth. Don't you say's nothin', but you lie low, an' hold a straight face,

an' just listen to ol' man Moses, an' I'se tellin' you a little somthin'!"

The old man explained that Early had actually been here in Star Cross, unknown to the white folks, that he had told them wonderful things about John Brown. The Lord had raised him up to be the great Elijah of the slaves, to free them from bondage, to say to them:

> "Sure there's a God that rules on high,
> A God that hears His children cry."

Early declared that Brown would never rest, and never "give up" till the whole North was roused to the cry of the helpless. It looked dark just now, the stain of sin was on the hands of the rulers in Washington, and Kansas was being sold to Satan, but even if Kansas was lost, "The Lord would make another way to reach His end," "His arm was not shortened." "It's an ole nigger dat says it, Marse Wentworth," continued Moses, "an ole nigger, sure 'nough, but dat 'ar man am a true 'Postle, am anointed ob de Lord God, for sure he's not a counting up de cost, he's a going forward, trustin' in de Lord, an' he heeds de cry ob de poor, de sufferin' ob de broken hearted, de Lord bless him, an' de Lord aid him, he's a bringin' in de mighty God's great charter ob freedom, sure 'nough!"

While Oliver listened to the old man's earnest, though half whispered talk, the passion of the great purpose with which John Brown had first inspired him, thrilled more deeply than ever in his heart. The checks and misfor-

tunes, which had already beset him, had, for the moment, given him touches of homesickness, and a sense of the utter hopelessness of contending against the powers of fate. But he had not left home, and friends, and fortune, and comfort, to turn back beaten! Everything must be counted as dross before this one soul-stirring divine call. He panted once more for the fierce strain of action. His colour was in his face, and his eyes aflame, as he asked of Moses:

"Will Early be in the village again tonight?"

"Yes, yes, Marse Wentworth, he'll be in de village dis night, an' not alone, Marse, not alone! De Lord help him, an' de Lord sustain."

Before Moses could further disclose whatever plans were evidently maturing, the conversation was abruptly ended, by the appearance of Master Phil at the little gate, saying, over his shoulder:

"I told you so, didn't I? D' you think I don't know?" And Colonel Mendenhall came through, and looked across to Oliver.

Phil remained, holding himself in the half-opened gate, that he might have a ready means of exit, the youngster's taste of Oliver's methods not inviting him to any rash exposure. Mendenhall strode quickly forward. Something in the inclination of his head, as well as in the gleaming light leaping from his dark eyes, vividly suggested that he was in no amiable mood.

It was to old man Moses he spoke.

"You shall have a turn at the whipping post, you old

mongrel! I've warned you what your politics would bring you, and now I catch you in the act! Mumbling your damned plots, and your devilish conspiracies!"

Oliver, conscious that the shaft aimed at the slave was meant equally for him, hotly interrupted. "Turn your remarks to me, Colonel. If I choose to talk to old man Moses, I demand the civility of your attention to me, not to him."

"My good Yankee friend, and prisoner," retorted Mendenhall, with sarcastic precision, "you shall be abundantly gratified with all the consideration you can demand, presently. In the meantime, may I claim your pardon, while I adjust these domestic concerns for my very dear friend and host, the good rector, whose fruit is certainly likely to rot, under the admirable attention of overseer Moses." Turning to the now shrinking and cowering old man, he cried savagely, "Where's your whip, you mangy, grizzled old whelp?"

"De Lord's sake, Co'nel, I don't go to need no whip wid dese niggers."

But the Colonel turned and tore a heavy switch from the orange hedge. With its thorny length, he struck the old man a savage slash across the shoulders and head. "I'll get you to work," he cried with accompanying oaths, "if I can't stop your tongue." The first stroke tore up a rent in Moses' shirt, half way across his back, and brought a stream of blood from the sweeping scratches over his neck, ears and face.

There was nothing out of the common in such an act.

But to Oliver the sight was unendurable. He sprang at Mendenhall, striking his upraised arm with so quick and sudden a blow, that the switch flew from his grasp, and he only saved himself from a fall by a rapid turn. Oliver stood well up to him.

All the darkies in the field were gasping on their knees at the sight, and old Moses was down, too, calling on the Lord of hosts to be witness to his innocence. But the Colonel drew a couple of steps back, feeling for his pistol. Oliver supposed that was how it would end, and as he was unarmed, had only to await the inevitable issue. But the Colonel did not hasten. Instead, very deliberately, he drew from his belt two long barrelled duelling pistols.

"I am your debtor for bringing this about." He spoke leisurely, with his eye upon Oliver, his moustache lifting, his expression gathering concentration steadily. He was a master in the devilish etiquette of professional killing. But Oliver was not the man with whom Mendenhall's methods were likely to be effective. Peril, and contact with an antagonist, emboldened him. Close consideration of reasons no longer held him in check. Instead of darkening, his brow cleared.

"As you please, Colonel!" Oliver replied boldly. "Though he were black as night, I can't see a feeble old man beaten, without defending him."

"Pish! A slave's carrion! Not worth killing. You are cattle of another colour. I've never been able to look on one of your stripe without my fingers twitching."

"We need not bandy words," Oliver interrupted. "You have me at a disadvantage."

Oliver was watching with clear, alert eyes, but the Colonel was very wary.

"I can drop you where you stand, for the traitor and dog that you are," he hissed, viciously handling his weapons, "but I prefer killing you in the more formal way."

"I esteem your consideration, as it gives me a chance," Oliver retorted gaily.

The cheerfulness, and perfect unembarrassment of his victim still further angered Mendenhall. To see the man expand and grow bright, instead of shrinking and trembling, enraged him.

"Under the sycamores is a pretty place for a grave. I shall give you the same courtesy I might extend to an equal." The Colonel thought he detected a little wincing under that thrust, and continued: "Follow this hedge, and as long as you walk straight, I shall not shoot you in the back. Let me, however, advise you to make you last will and testament, viva voce, and I will request Miss Fairfax to deliver it to your relatives, on her intended visit to the Boston aunt."

The mention of Barbara brought the cloud to Oliver's face, for which Mendenhall expectantly watched. To die, and have nothing but the vile things said of him to her, which Mendenhall would invent,—that was hard to bear.

"It may perhaps relieve your mind," Mendenhall continued, "to know that while Miss Fairfax's journey will

put off our wedding, it will only be a short delay. So you can rest in your grave assured that no harm came from your pleasant efforts to divert the affections of the young lady."

Oliver came to a quick halt at this dastardly insinuation, but Mendenhall was too inwardly inflamed to restrain himself, and continued savagely:

"You have at least furnished us a hearty laugh. Miss Fairfax considered it an admirable joke, she who so brilliantly spied upon and outwitted your famous abolitionist leader, old Brown, to have her head turned by a stripling out of that nest—"

Two or three things happened before Mendenhall finished his sentence.

As they moved beside the hedge, Oliver noticed that several of the Colenel's men were creeping down on the other side. When they came to the sycamores by the river, the hedge ended, and both parties would come together. It was doubtless a planned trap. His chance as one party in a duel was a mere sham. Probably he would be given a blank charge. Instantly it flashed across his mind, that here in the garden he had friendly sympathisers; if he made a dash for it, they would promote and not impede, his escape, whereas if he went on to the end of the hedge he was doomed. He had resolved to risk it, and start away, when the Colonel spoke of Barbara. Then came that lying insult.

Oliver never knew what words he hurled at his captor, in the same instant that he sprang upon him. By a for-

tunate chance, he struck the loaded pistol from Mendenhall's hand at the first blow, and though the Colonel pulled the trigger of the other, the flame only singed Oliver's shoulder, and the next instant they were falling, Mendenhall below.

The darkies set up a scream of delight, as they saw their champion throw his antagonist. But they were powerless against the Colonel's own men, who, leaping over the hedge, dragged Oliver from their chief. For a moment it looked as though they would kill him there and then, and Mendenhall's first words, as he sat up were:

"Blow his head off ——!"

But before the order was executed, he cried out:

"By G—d, no! I'd have killed him before, but now, by G—d! I'll have him flayed! I'll,—Stein, when does a boat go down the river?"

"Tomorrow, Colonel."

"Then I'll brand him! I'll brand him myself, and ship him down to a felon's hell! Twenty years' torture, if he can live it out, eh!"

CHAPTER XXI

IT was late evening. The summer darkness drew slowly round the quiet village of Star Cross. From the lower lands near the river, the smell of newly-mown hay, cocked and capped for the night, wafted along the empty village streets, mingling with mixed and pungent perfumes from many little garden plots. Not a breath of air stirred the motionless and silent leaves of the laurels, magnolias and catalpas, that hung over the fences. So much hot vapour rose from the earth that scarcely any stars could be seen. Only the frogs, crickets and katydids seemed to be perfectly alive in the oppressive heat, and filled the night with a jubilee of vibratory trills, burrings and chirrupings.

Oliver was again in the block house, Chute and Mike Stein having thrown him in there for the night, after the encounter in the strawberry patch, awaiting Mendenhall's purpose to send him down the river in the morning.

Tonight the inner door was barred, and the heat was suffocating. Yet, as he lay there, helpless, hopeless, doomed, he wondered at his own serenity of mind. There was a dim consciousness in his heart, of the truth of the old familiar words, "He that worketh righteousness, he that speaketh the truth in his heart, he that doeth these

things, shall never be moved. Though he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down." "I took my own silent vow, to suffer for this cause," he told himself, "and there's an end of it." But beyond even the thought of the war for freedom, and the shedding of blood for the oppressed, there came to him, a strangely tender joy, which in the foolishness of his youth and ardent nature he attributed to the fact that it was here, in this dungeon, in these chains, that he first saw Barbara Fairfax.

He did not muse long after the night set in before he heard an unusual sound in the distance, quickly pierced by sharp shouts and cries. He sat up and listened, with strained attention. There was a deep rushing noise, as of sweeping winds, but the roar was pierced by a crisp, crackling sound, terrible to hear,—it was fire! Fire, at the foot of the hill! Fire, licking up the old saw mill, and the great piles of slabs, and scantling, and logs. Oliver wondered at the quickness of his own solution of the unfamiliar noise. Then he heard many voices and shouts. All the inhabitants of Star Cross were hurrying to subdue the flames. He lay listening. Presently there came a scuffling at the door. Blows were being exchanged. Angry imprecations rose, but were quickly silenced. Hands were fumbling with the lock at the door. A few more moments of intense suspense, and Oliver's heart leapt at the appearance of tall figures in the gloom, and a voice whispering:

"Friends! The Browns! Get up if you can. Quick. Are you bound?"

"I know, Marse, I know." It was the familiar voice of Toffy Moses, who darted to the wall, secured the key, and was at Oliver's side, unlocking the padlocked chains.

Half lifting Oliver, Owen and Frederick Brown hurried him out. Two other men joined them at the door, and all hastily descended to the village street. Here were their horses, and a guard of half a dozen mounted men.

"This will please father, mightily," Owen was saying as they leaped to the saddle, and rode boldly across the village square. "He was very gloomy over losing you, Wentworth. And the worst of it was, we heard that you were butchered, in the Indian village."

"By heaven!" Oliver responded, "if I ever get back to your camp I shall think I have a charmed life."

They were leaving the roar of the fire behind them. Looking over his shoulder, Oliver saw the sky lurid under a canopy of heavy smoke.

"It won't do to take the village ford," Owen Brown said. "We must keep along the river, and try the crossing at the French settlement."

"Was this expedition for my relief?" queried Oliver.

"Surely," Owen answered.

"By what God's messenger did you hear of my plight?"

"The young Moses fellow. He belongs in this place. Came in to see his old mammy. We got the idea you might make an escape with a little outside assistance, and were moving up this way when the news reached us that you were in fresh trouble, and dangerous trouble, too. Well, we moved up rapidly, but were not in force enough

to dislodge the whole company of our friend the Virginian Colonel. So Early undertook to give us a clear course by firing the timber yard. It was his idea. I hope he will get out of it as well as we have."

"Why, you are not leaving him behind?"

"Oh, he agreed to that. Our purpose was to rescue you. If we succeeded in getting hold of you, we were to ride for Kansas, and trust him to slip away on his own wits."

"What!" Oliver began, reining in his horse.

"Trust him, he'll be all right," Owen continued. When it comes to slipperiness and cunning, a slave can squeeze through a smaller knot hole than you or I."

"But I shall feel as though his life were given for mine if,—if he is caught."

Brown made no response and the party came to a halt.

But at the same moment the advance guard wheeled his horse, and riding back, informed Owen there was a team on the road ahead. Owen rode out to investigate, and soon returned in good humour.

"It's the whole Moses family," he cried. "Patriarch and pickaninny. Forward again."

"Is Early with you?" Oliver asked, eagerly, as they came up to a rattletrap vehicle, which was indeed nothing more than an old abandoned buckboard, to which a temporary bed in the shape of a couple of two-bushel hampers had been lashed.

"We's gwine to meet him to de Frenchman's crossing,

Marse Wentworth! Oh, de Lord bless my ol' eyes for seein' you again, once more, Marse!"

"Your old eyes are right smart ones, Moses, if they can make me out in this darkness. But are you sure of Early? Do you know that he got away from the village?"

"Sure 'nough! It's most more'n time he's waiting for we uns now. He lit de torch, and den run, cut t'rew de woods."

"Well, Moses," Owen Brown put in, "you don't hold your whole family responsible for this thing do you?"

"All but Theophilus, Marse. Dat chile, he am so fixed in his 'fections for Missy Babbie dere's no takin' him 'way no how. But all de rest ob we uns, we's makin' along wid you white folks here, Marse, to de blessed refuge of de pore slave, nex' to the Lord A'mighty, de camp ob de great Captain, John Brown."

"You'd better not reckon on what he can do for you, Moses. The Captain is stemming hard seas just now. There's a price on his head, a Federal warrant out for his arrest, Uncle Sam's dragoons riding the roads on the watch for him, his camp broken up, half his band taken or wounded, most of the rest of us scattered! I tell you, old man, the Captain can offer no refuge, or shelter, to any one; he has none himself. He is homeless, and hunted. A stranger in his own country, made a criminal by the President of these United States, and the very men who, before God, ought to uphold his hands and strengthen his heart!"

"Blessed am ye, when men sh'll 'proach ye, an' pussecute ye, an' say ebery manner ob evil 'gainst ye, fer my sake," quoted Moses, with great feeling.

When they reached the crossing, which was a mile or so above the ford at Star Cross, there was Early Moses, glad enough to rejoin his friends and get his horse, but astonished to find his aged father and all the family determined upon this hazardous flight. No arguments, however, could persuade old Moses to turn back.

"We uns is useful niggers, Marse Wentworth," he declared. "We's not shiftless; we's activorous! We do most greatest number ob different kind ob work."

"That may be true enough, but women and children cannot fight. They'll have to hide, run, suffer, and likely starve before we can get them to safety."

"We's willin' to suffer, Marse, oh, we's been held close in de hard hand ob affliction, we's 'sperienced sufferers, Marse. An' its like dis, it's come up to me like in de ole book ob de holy Bible, it tells how it was come up to de ole man David one day. De Lord A'mighty he 'pears sudden one day, an' he says: 'Dere is three things, David, choose ye one ob dem, dat I may lay it on thee!' An' David he shiver some, an' grow tremblous, but he say: 'Speak, Lord, I'se a-listenin'.' An' de Lord A'mighty answers, an' tells him: 'Dese am de three things, seben years ob famine, three months of slaughter, three days ob pestilence!' An' David he was in great straits, it was mighty jub'ous choosing, but he says by an' by, 'Let me

fall into de hand ob de Lord, for de mercies ob de Lord am great.' "

"Well?"

"Well, Marse, dis family ob pore old nigger Moses hyar, dey am been in de hands ob man long 'nough. Now dey's gwine to be free niggers an' dey says, 'Dere am freedom in Kansas, wid Capn. Brown, tho' dere is hunger an' starvation, dat am de Lord's pestilence, let us fall into de hands ob de Lord, for His mercies am great.' "

"We shall have to take them along, Wentworth," Owen said, as he ordered his men to ride forward. "Father would never forgive me if a slave were refused protection in his name."

All night the little company moved along steadily. The danger of pursuit increased by the necessity of reducing their speed to enable the patriarch Moses with his rickety team to keep with them. Still the hours passed, and either their flight had not been discovered, or if any pursuit was started it had missed them. The dull, breathless silence of the grey hours preceding sunrise was over all things, the myriad insects hidden in the grass, the wild fowl asleep in the reedy margins of pools and creeks, the colonies of prairie dogs buried in their sandy mounds. Even the warm wind waited for day, and the only sound the tired travellers heard as they wended their way along the rough approach to Brown's temporary camp was the hard breathing of their horses and the irregular rattling of Moses' overloaded buckboard. Oliver, who was riding forward with Owen, was eager to greet Captain Brown

again, eager to find out what hope for the cause the stern deliverer could still cherish, baffled and beaten as he was, the whole territory under the heel of a slave-owning Governor, his eldest son a prisoner with Gov. Robinson, James H. Lane, and most of the Free State leaders, charged with high treason, while United States troops were searching for Brown himself, urged on by the price set upon his head. They did not, however, expect to find the camp yet astir, and were surprised when the sentry told them that the Captain could be found at the rear of the wagons, where Ottawa Jones and his family were quartered in a rough bark tent.

Here Owen and Oliver sought him. But at the open door of the rude shelter they stopped, fearing to intrude upon a scene so sorrowful and pathetic. John Brown sat on a wooden bench, with a sick child upon his knee, his great massive head uncovered, the gray hair shaggier than usual, framing with waving outlines his iron features. A tin cup from which he had been softly bathing the little one's fevered lips stood on the bench beside him. In a bed behind, the other children were crowded together in sound slumber. The mother, on her knees, at the foot, sobbed while her husband vainly endeavoured to comfort her. A flickering candle on a shelf glimmered in the creeping morning light, giving to the interior of the tiny room a ghostly and unreal aspect.

At the sound of footsteps, Brown looked up. His keen eyes seemed dim, and all the lines of his stern face were strangely softened. He raised his hand in a cau-

tioning gesture, but did not speak or move. Both Owen and Oliver stood silently. The slight form of the child perceptibly quivered, and stiffened, as it lay in the blanket upon Brown's knees. Even Owen Brown, hardened by his rough life and familiarity with pain and suffering, could not look upon this pathetic scene unmoved. And Oliver found a mist filling his eyes, and a lump hardening in his throat, as he gazed at this stern leader of brave men whose whole heart and soul were now engrossed in the desperate and stupendous task of striking the fetters from three million slaves in the face of an angry nation enamoured of its sin, turning to spend the watches of the night in tender ministrations to a dying child.

Then the deep mellow voice of the Captain, touched with an inexpressible pathos, began reciting:

"And God shall wipe away all tears!....There shall be no more sorrow, nor crying....no more pain....they shall not hunger, nor thirst....for he that hath mercy upon them, shall lead them,....by the springs of water shall he guide them."

His eyes were closed, but as he lifted his worn face, tears lay along the lashes.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

After these solemn words, so simply spoken, there was a deep hush. Then the mother, realising that her little one's frail thread of life had broken at last, cried aloud. The eldest girl, fallen into troubled slumber on the bed,

started up, and looked with fearful expectation at the Captain's uplifted face.

John Brown rose, and softly, with the deftness of a woman, laid the tiny body gently back upon its bed of fragrant boughs, closed the eyes, touched for the last time the delicate brow, that needed no more the long hours of patient soothing, and came quietly out to greet Oliver.

"Come!" he said, hastily recovering his usual composure. "Come away! Let us pace up and down here a bit. I'm stiff with sitting. That's the child that was ailing when the Missourian raiders burnt the family out of house and home. You remember, Wentworth. Poor child! Poor mother!"

Locking his arm in Oliver's, and telling Owen to turn in and get some rest before the morning's early start, the Captain began a swinging march under the trees, where the first "golden exhalations of the dawn" breathed an exquisite sweetness. After a few long strides, he began in lighter tone:

"Wentworth, my faith wavered in you when you let that Delilah of Star Cross, with her handsome face and ensnaring eyes, slip the dragoons upon us, but,—no, no, not a word. There's no blame, I know the facts, and as to the girl! I'm not foolish over woman's beauty, but it made me nervous to have her in camp. For a Southerner, she had a face as fair, as honest, before God, I'd have trusted her as I would you."

Oliver would have said a good deal to Captain Brown at this moment, he would have declared his absolute con-

fidence in all the virtues ideally combined in the person of Miss Fairfax, but it was a difficult matter to interrupt. Brown took one into his friendship as a listener; he seldom descended to dialogue. Now he went on, with gathering feeling:

"There's a suggestion of that girl's face on the side of that boulder."

In the gray light, Oliver could see, gleaming upon the red rock, an outline of what certainly seemed to him a familiar face. It was formed by a lichen patch, and looked like a bas-relief in silver.

"I have often found strange suggestions in such things," Brown continued. " 'Out of the heart of Nature old, the burdens of the Bible rolled,' and that face, Wentworth, as I have wrestled here, wrestled with the Lord, in striving for a way out of this darkness, that face suddenly appeared to me as an angel of Annunciation, herald of a divine message. Ideas have to be born! Deeds have their pre-natal months! And here under these trees has come to me the conception of a great deed, a single act, to be brought forth in sudden birth at the right moment, that in the sight of the Eternal God shall strike this mighty sin of slavery dead."

Brown halted. With his face lifted, he seemed as though registering a silent vow.

Oliver was deeply moved. There was a thrill of conviction in Brown's always wonderful voice that was infectious.

"God knows how it may be brought about," Brown

went on again. "What he wills must be! But of this I am now convinced, He is calling me! I am henceforth under compulsion. An instrument in his hands. To go as He guides me to the conclusion of this matter!"

The old veteran seemed for the moment to forget Oliver's presence. It was evident that his mind was strongly wrought upon by the prophetic nature of the hopes and ideals which possessed him.

Presently, however, passing his hand across his broad brows, and sweeping up his grizzled hair with a gesture familiar to him, he spoke in ordinary tones.

"But you, Wentworth! I want you to go back to Boston."

"Boston!" Oliver cried, with indignant remonstrance. "Every one would seem to be in league to drive me there. But you, Captain, I had at least hoped that you, that I had proved to you my determination to stand by this cause. That I am ready to pay for it, fight for it, and continue fighting for it, while there is a dollar left to give or a drop of blood to shed."

"Brave words, my boy, brave words, and don't think I doubt their sincerity. You have more than shown us your mettle. But this effort is useless, and hopeless. It is not in Kansas that the one awakening blow must be struck. You are too good material to be spilt out here. Why, heaven bless you, the great West has about as much use for you as a horse has for an almanac!"

Oliver was anxious to dissipate this view of his own value, declaring that of stay-at-homes, with all manner

of ability, and any quantity of sympathy, there was an unlimited supply, and that he had no intention whatever of deserting his present active service, however valueless it might seem to the Captain.

Brown took his hand and held it firmly, looking at him with fine appreciation. Then he said:

"Wentworth, I have the utmost confidence in you. Now listen to me. I cannot disclose to you, I shall not to my own sons, what I already see to be inevitable. I will not involve one more life than the work compels. But if you are ready when the call comes I will take you, Wentworth, I will take you! Now, do what I advise. Go to Dr. Howe, to Higginson, to Stearns, get them to see the inevitableness of war. You have seen what the slave power means to do, and to what lengths it will go before it yields. Study the conditions, and be fitting yourself for the tremendous responsibilities that will fall upon the leaders of our country, fall like thunder bolts out of heaven, before anyone is ready to grapple with them. Have I not heard you say your father was a friend of Edwin M. Stanton? Go to Washington. Go to Stanton, convince him that the hands of the great clock of fate are nearing the hour. His influence may swing the nation into line. It cannot be that Washington is so helplessly bound as to be incapable of even a voice to raise against the tyranny that throttles her!"

Oliver meant to remain by the Captain while there was any danger to be encountered. He did not, however, want further to oppose his express wishes, and it was

understood that should he return East, Brown would keep him informed of his movements.

When they parted, Oliver ventured to say: "Won't you turn in and rest, Captain, after that long watching?" Oliver hesitated, he did not like to say more. A wonderful tenderness spread over the old man's rugged face. He looked back towards the rude hut where lay the poor little body, not yet cold.

"Happy child," he murmured. "At rest! At rest! Ah, Wentworth, I am thinking of one who is not at rest. My brave, good wife. Alone, there at the little farm at North Elba. Deprived both of her husband and her sons. Waiting! Waiting!"

Oliver turned silently away, and John Brown continued his striding march, up and down, beneath the trees where the morning light began to make soft shadows.

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE Oliver closed his eyes, wearied as he was, the whole little camp was astir. Frederick Brown came riding in, immensely excited, and spreading a contagion of alarm from man to man as he hurried forward to find his father. Riding in for mail to the neighbouring postoffice the previous night, he had been arrested on the road by a party of dragoons, who claimed his horse was one stolen from an officer of their troop. He was taken by them to their Colonel's headquarters. He did not dare to prove his ownership in the horse, for he should then be forced to declare his own identity, and that would have been greater cause for prompt judgment than a false conviction for horse theft. On reaching the Colonel's quarters, however, that officer was preparing a hasty reception to some visiting Missourian leaders and would not be disturbed. So Frederick was detained to await the Colonel's pleasure. Fortunately the reception developed into a general carousal, and the prisoner was about the only sober man in the camp before half the night had passed. He might have made his escape sooner than he did, but discovering that the principal guest was none other than Mendenhall, so short a time before their own prisoner, he

ventured to wait for several hours at the back of the tents, in the hope of overhearing something which might reveal the Missourian's intentions. And Frederick's patience and risk were well rewarded. Between the roar of response to such toasts as "Kansas, a Slave State, or a Sea of Blood!" "Kansas Lands, One Hundred and Sixty Acres to Every Pro-Slavery Settler; Six Feet by Two for Every Abolitionist!" "Southern Rights and Damn the Yankees," he caught Mendenhall's declaration to the dragoon officer, that he could put him in possession of the old gray fox, Brown, inside of three hours. He knew just where he lay, and nothing was easier than to put a cordon of cavalry entirely around his camp and so bag every man of them. The dragoon Colonel, however, absolutely refused to stir till they had "had a night of it," and Frederick slipped away to give warning. There was no doubt that as soon as the Colonel was sufficiently sober his whole command, some three hundred mounted men, would be riding down upon Brown's retreat.

On hearing Frederick's news, the old Captain seemed calmly indifferent. It was the quiet satisfaction of never slumbering readiness, however, and not a weaker disregard of wise precaution. Brown was absorbed in a mighty task, but he neglected no reasonable details for present safety. Indeed, he could not afford to fall into his enemies' hands while his mission was as yet so far from fulfilment. The measures he took were, however, extraordinary ones. All the rifles and cutlasses were carefully buried in a pit previously prepared, where they

could be recovered when needed. The men were divided into groups of two and three together, and immediately sent off in carefully prescribed directions, some to return to their settlements, others to circuit to certain distant rendezvous, there to await communications from their leader. The half breed Indian woman and her children were left in the bark shelter, Ottawa Jones going with Owen Brown to neighbours who could be relied upon to care for the little ones and keep them fed. Early Moses was assigned to Oliver Wentworth to pilot him to railroad communication. Brown himself undertook the convoy of the Moses family, who had so unpropitiously thrown themselves upon his protection. He drew out his old wagon, with the trap door in the bottom of the bed, loaded it over with what appeared to be about a half ton of hay, and invited Moses, with Mammy Mine and the children, to creep in through the trap door. Then Brown mounted on to the top and started at once on the straight road towards the camp of the United States dragoons.

Oliver, who insisted on remaining till the last arrangements were completed, could not forbear an attempt to dissuade the Captain from such rashness. Brown answered quietly:

"Wentworth, you can't teach me a thing about border warfare. I've told you to 'git,' and that lively, some half hour back, and you may wish you'd done it before the next half hour's come and gone. You look out for yourself. I'm going to save these poor slaves if I have to

carry them through to Canada." The Captain started, but he pulled up a moment to call out:

"Tell our friends in the East I won't disappoint them.

> " 'Have ye forgot, or never knew,
> That God will judge the judges, too!' "

Then John Brown drew a ragged rabbit skin cap carefully over his bristling hair, bent his broad shoulders into an aged stoop, stuck a wisp of hay in the corner of his mouth, and drove on to meet his enemies.

In less time than Brown had predicted, Oliver and Early Moses discovered the wisdom of his advice. Troopers were seen traversing distant ridges in all directions. There could have been no other chance for Brown's own escape than the bold measure he had taken. And that, in any other hands, might only have meant disaster. Brown, however, was of iron nerve. He pulled to the side of the narrow trail as the main body of cavalry met him. He coolly commented in critical vein on their appearance, and with an old pioneer's freedom he chaffed the commanding officer himself, who at the very moment had in his pocket a warrant from the Governor of Kansas which read: "On my authority take Captain John Brown, dead or alive. I shall hold you personally responsible for the fulfilment of this order."

No one guessed, however, that in this foolish old countryman breathed the fiery spirit of the one daring and inspired man, whose escape at this moment was fraught with unimaginable consequences to the nation

and the world. As an eagle swoops in the sudden gale, only to rise again, poised for a swifter strike, so the dauntless hero passed his enemies that day, to rise higher and higher, before the triumph of his final defeat.

But for Oliver and Early the task of eluding the groups of horsemen, circling well around them, was even more difficult. They soon found themselves obliged to abandon their horses and creep stealthily along the winding bed of the Panwek, a wooded creek draining into the Osage. But even here they were presently brought to a stand. At a ford, there being still some water in the creek, four or five dragoons were already stationed and beginning preparations for temporary quarters there. As no detour into the prairie was possible while the present watchfulness continued, there was nothing for it but to give themselves up or endeavour to escape observation where they were. They decided upon the latter course. They succeeded in wading out to a sandy bank in midstream, which had the appearance of being entirely overlooked from the high banks of the creek. "They'll 'magine der's nothin' livin' on dis bit o' sand bed," said Early, and so far he was wise, for twice during the day, as he and Oliver lay in the little shallow pit they hollowed out for themselves behind a fringe of dried sticks and driftwood, a patrol rode up and down, forcing a way through the brush, dismounting, and beating along the edge of the stream on either bank.

But what Early did not reckon upon, and of which neither of them spoke, was starvation. For four days they

remained there. Each night the number of dragoons stationed at this particular point made it impossible to break through the lines. Each day they waited and waited in the burning heat, thinking it impossible that the soldiers would remain longer. Each night they made a careful reconnaissance, only to be compelled to draw back. They had nothing to eat; their pistols were so damp they were useless; they could not defend themselves; they were rapidly growing so weak that soon they would be unable even to profit by a chance of escape; still they never thought of surrender. Or if they did, no word of such suggestion escaped from either. On the sixth day there were evident signs of departure on the part of the soldiers, and during the evening they were withdrawn north. Weak and weary, Oliver and Early started with grateful hearts to push south to the Osage, having decided that as they were unlikely to be able to reach the railroad, they would try the river. Early, in spite of his exhaustion, would not consent to showing themselves out of the creek timber, so for the next twenty-four hours, weak as they were, they stumbled along, resting occasionally and picking some wild plums. But the coloured boy had been through trying scenes preceding this adventure without time to recuperate, and while Oliver was plodding ahead with his teeth set and his hollow cheeks drawn tight, he found himself suddenly alone. Turning back, he soon discovered Early crouched on the ground, his hands clasped over his heart, an expression of terror on his black face. The brave lad would not cry out, and, seeing

Oliver returning, shook his head and tried to sign to him to go on and leave him. Oliver turned Early over on his back, propped him carefully with his coat rolled under his head, and fanned him with his hat. Presently he felt better. Then Oliver picked him up in his arms and by short stages succeeded in carrying him away from the bed of the creek till they came upon a well travelled road. Here Oliver decided to risk an appeal to the first passers by for assistance to save the boy's life.

After waiting till the heat of the day began to cool and no one appearing, Early in the meantime seeming to be sinking and losing consciousness, Oliver started away to seek a settlement. He went only round a bend in the road, when he heard horses approaching the spot where Early lay. He turned to retrace his steps. As he came within sight there were figures in the road and some one leaning over Early and calling him by name. It was Early's little brother Toffy. And by him stood his mistress, Miss Barbara Fairfax. Oliver was tottering with weakness, but he went forward and was met by Barbara, waving her whip and looking very indignant. She cried out: "Is this what your promised freedom brings the slave? Is it to be abused, and beaten, and thrown on the roadside to die?"

Far from the truth as Barbara was, her implication conveyed no meaning to Oliver. He stared blankly, reeled like a man intoxicated, strove to recover himself, but instead slowly collapsed, sinking onto the road. There is nothing romantic or picturesque in mere physical ex-

haustion. Yet Oliver's condition was as pitiable as though he had sunk at Barbara's feet, pierced with wounds. Barbara at first shrinking back, horrified, in another moment realised something of the true situation.

"Help us, God!" she cried, and fell on her knees.

The colour went from her face as she looked at him, lying there senseless. But when she drew his head into her lap, her cheeks glowed wonderfully, her soft eyes beamed warmth upon him, her lips quivered over the breathing of his name.

In the meantime Toffy, with the delirious grief so characteristic of his race, literally wallowed in the sandy roadside, crying upon all the holy names in his vocabulary:

"Oh, Lord Gord A'mighty, oh, Hebenly Massa, oh, J'hovah, King o' Glory, Lamb o' Mercy, don' go fer to get holt ob dis pore color'd boy just yet a bit. Oh, spare 'im, Lordy, for thy mercies sakes! Spare 'im, Lordy! Spare 'im, Lordy! Spare 'im!"

Toffy kept up his mournful appeal with such persistency, abasing himself in the meanwhile so completely that he did not see Early open his eyes, and only ceased his wailing when he heard his name.

"Toffy!"

"Gord's m'rcies, are ye' livin' or dead, Early? Are ye' livin' or dead?"

"Whar's Massa Wentworth?"

"He's thar', as dead as ye is ye'sef, jes' as dead."

"Mebe we ain't none so dead."

"Bless de Lord!"

"My head's dat flighty," Early continued, pausing between his words, in dizzy weakness. "I don't reckon to know whar' I been."

"Yer' ain't no gun. Dar's mud an' wet! Dar's burrs and briars! You'se been hidin' an' chased! You'se famished!" Toffy reached his conclusion with a jerk, as he checked off the points of his reasoning. "You'se famished."

"Dat's so!" Early agreed. "I'se starvin'."

Now Theophilus had eaten well that day, but a beaten biscuit which had seemed beyond his capacity at the time found its way to his blouse pocket, and he immediately produced it. Early's eyes dilated at the sight. He made a quick grab for it. But at his lips, stopped.

"Marse Wentworth," he murmured, "Marse Wentworth."

Barbara was calling Toffy, who left his brother to the consolations of the biscuit, and hastened to get for her a flask from the saddle bag.

The tender and even passionate deftness and care with which Barbara bestowed her ministrations upon Oliver were checked instantly, as, recovering from the passing faintness, he began to apologise for his condition. A terrible fear lest she might inadvertently show the great emotion she found in her heart, an almost appalling doubt as to how much he was conscious of what she had already done, compelled her to assume a carefully studied air of quiet composure. She knew nothing of what had passed between Oliver and Mendenhall in the strawberry field

other than the report Toffy gave her, which related only to Oliver's defence of the old man, Moses. She knew nothing of the lies about herself the Colonel had passionately flung at Oliver. Nothing of Oliver's scorn of them. On his part he believed so much of Mendenhall's fabrications as to suppose Barbara was still the Colonel's affianced bride. All her acts, prompted by her secret love towards himself, were unknown to him. He was perfectly ignorant that Barbara alone planned his first escape from the Star Cross block house, that she saved him from terrible death in the Indian village by committing herself to a vow which to fulfil was inconceivable torture, and which to break was to rouse passions, jealousies, and enemies, with dangerously inevitable consequences. He did not know that Barbara had already taken the decisive step in refusing to hold herself by that vow; that she had done this, because the love growing in her heart could not bear the deceit, and that she was even now struggling with herself, suffering disgrace in the eyes of her parents and her friends, but bearing all things for his sake! Had he guessed the least of these things! But that he should not, Barbara was now schooling herself by every effort to appear cold and distant. Little, however, was necessary, for no slightest thought of such unimaginable truth had yet entered Oliver's mind. He had indeed every reason to suppose that absolutely insurmountable barriers did, and must forever, separate his own fortunes from those of Barbara Fairfax.

Barbara's reserve did not, however, prevent her from

drawing from him the fact that he was now attempting to carry out the very purpose she had herself urged upon him—a return to the East. Toffy having been sent along the road to a neighbouring settler's for assistance, soon returned with a wagon and one of the men who helped the Gibsons when Barbara so unexpectedly met the sad funeral procession. And Oliver and Early were driven away to receive the care and food they needed to fit them for further exertion, Toffy calling out: "Don' go'n forget mammy an' Saphronia, Early!"

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN BROWN'S camp having been effectually broken up and the future freedom of Kansas left to other influences than the efforts of these daring pioneers, Colonel Mendenhall and Colonel Buford returned to Star Cross before disbanding their men.

Buford's evident favour in Barbara's eyes was beginning to turn upon him the jealous and dangerous anger of his brother officer, when a meeting between Mendenhall and the busy brained little Phil brought a more engrossing business to Mendenhall's attention.

"I'm as mad as the devil!" Mendenhall had declared, coming unexpectedly upon Phil, after an irritating attempt to obtain some relaxation of Barbara's evident purpose to avoid him.

"You look it!" promptly retorted Phil, "and that's generally the time you're the biggest fool."

"D——n!' responded the Colonel. "I should like to——"

"The very best advice you ever had," Phil went on, "was what I gave you. And I can give you more of the same sort if you had the sense to listen."

The Colonel barely restrained himself from violence,

but relieved the tension with a quick burst of fiery expletives.

"Good!" cried the little cripple, flapping his arms over his crutches like diminutive wings.

> "The mariner curseth the warning bird,
> That bringeth him news of the storm, unheard."

"You're as blind as a bat. It ain't Buford. Not a bit. Haven't I told you it was that fiend-faced Yankee, that free State abolitionist New Englander, who upset your chance with Babbie? And you've let him slip away every time, till he laughs at you for a mooncalf!"

"Phil, you go to ——!" cried the enraged Colonel, and started away. But Phil held him with the piercing enquiry:

"I suppose you know where he is now? Eh?"

The Colonel was unprepared for this query, and for a moment looked doubtful. Phil followed it up with:

"I'll bet you a horse you don't! Look here! While you've been riding the Kansas prairies I haven't been asleep. I've had spies out. And that fellow is back here again."

"God!"

But Phil, seeing he had worked upon the Colonel's emotions to the proper limit, now led him to an inner room, where it was safer to discuss the situation and mature plans. At first, the Colonel was wholly incredulous, but Phil had little difficulty in confirming his statements. He had for weeks contrived to have every movement of Barbara watched, her conversations with Toffy

overheard, and today he discovered that Toffy intended to ride down to the lower Falls after dark tonight. Why? Well, Phil reckoned it was not for the fun of it. Suppose Mr. Wentworth was to take that boat, and Miss Babbie wanted to assure herself that he was safely embarked!

Phil chuckled, and rubbed his hands in high glee when the Colonel, with virulent animation, finally declared he would rid the land of this pestilent traitor if he followed him to St. Louis.

"You ought not to lose much time, Colonel," Phil urged. "If you want to take your men with you, I'll send you word down to the village as soon as Toffy gets away. Then your best plan will be to follow him, and if he does not lead you in a bee line to your man, stick me instead."

"If this is true, Phil, if this limb of the devil is on this boat, I'll kill him if I have to sink the ship." And Colonel Mendenhall hastened away to find his two orderlies and prepare them for the ride.

Now Theophilus Moses was perfectly innocent of any suspicion attending his ride down to the Lower Falls. Phil had exactly surmised the purpose of the trip. Toffy was to see that Oliver was safely on board, and to bring back a last message to Miss Barbara. He had no conception that anyone else in Star Cross was aware either of his own errand or that Oliver Wentworth was involved in it. He therefore paid no heed to the fact that at least one horseman was evidently going the same road with himself, yet when he stopped at the halfway tavern

and watered his horse, lingering a few moments, expecting the other traveller to appear, which, however, he did not, and when, after he got upon the road again, he heard the same sound of following hoof beats, he began to wonder whether he was being watched. He could not satisfy himself, however, until he was within sight of the river and the landing, but at the very moment when, having hitched his mule, he made his way across the gangway, he felt sure the shadows lurking in the edge of the timber meant mischief, either for himself or Oliver Wentworth.

It was too late to avoid further suspicion, however, and he hurried on to the boat.

In one of the few state rooms of the rickety little boat, the "Star of the West," he found Oliver, and immediately imparted to him his own fear of the suspicious movement of the men he began to suspect had followed him from Star Cross. Before Oliver appreciated the importance of Toffy's fears, however, loud voices were heard of men who wanted the best accommodations on the boat, and that their horses should be put on board. Oliver blew out the lamp on the wall of the tiny cabin. He realised that he must get off the boat as quickly and noiselessly as possible, otherwise he was trapped. He recognised Mendenhall's oily tones, and knew that once let the boat get well away from the settlement, it would not be difficult for Mendenhall to provoke a quarrel, and, with the aid of his men, Oliver might add one more to the familiar list of mysterious disappearances. He knew,

indeed, that Mendenhall had only to raise the cry that a member of Brown's army was on board, and every hand would be against him. He therefore decided at once to make the attempt to get ashore. By a series of skilful manœuvres they crept stealthily from the boat and concealed themselves behind bales of cotton piled along the wharf. In a few minutes, which seemed, however, to Oliver and Toffy to stretch into hours, the boat's bell clanged its signal and the men began casting off.

Mendenhall's impatience had, however, been so great he could not await the boat's departure. He well knew he could reckon on the support of all the crew in hunting out an abolition Yankee, and so he had already forced his way into Oliver's cabin, only to discover to his chagrin that he had slipped away. Now, therefore, he raised a tremendous uproar, with such effect that the Captain held the boat long enough to determine that the suspected Yankee was not on board, and to allow Colonel Mendenhall, with his orderlies and horses, to disembark.

For a moment Oliver and Toffy thought they might still have to fight for their lives. The odds, however, were far less than they would have been upon the boat.

But Mendenhall dashed immediately up the road, which was the only approach to the landing, making sure that he would overtake the fugitives, with little loss of time.

No sooner did the sound of galloping cease than Toffy hurried to his mule, safely concealed in the shadow of the timber, and, urging Oliver to mount, promised to lead him along a footpath following the river bank, by which

they might reach a ford, about a mile up stream, where a rowboat was kept. Oliver could go down the river in that and take the next day's steamer at some landing far enough away to avoid detection.

In the meantime Mendenhall rode wildly, till, furious and maddened that his enemy should once more have escaped him, he arrived at a lonely house known as the half way tavern. Here he dismounted, and, to drown his disgust, began drinking with his men in a manner that promised a fine score for the tavern keeper, and much cursing of aching heads for his men on the morrow.

"We'll make a night of it!" the Colonel cried. Adding to himself, "I'm d——d if I go back to the parsonage to face the jeers of that imp of Satan, young cripple Phil, or the cutting derision of the girl—curse her!" The more the Colonel drank, however, the less he seemed to forget his bad luck. He grew feverish, the cheap liquor seeming to arouse his most evil passions. While his men gradually subsided into a state of imbecile stupour, Mendenhall glowered across the table with ferocious aspect, vainly lashing his mind into some scheme of possible revenge.

All at once his attention was attracted by a faint tapping at the outer door. He heard the landlord patter across the adjoining room, and then, to his amazement and passionate joy, he distinctly heard Barbara's voice. He started to his feet, listening with every nerve.

Her horse had gone helplessly lame. Would the land-

lord come out and look at it? Could he find her another at once? She would pay any price for it. Mendenhall gripped the table. "She grew impatient," he murmured to himself. "She has been waiting on the road, expecting to meet that nigger boy returning with her lover's message. They've missed. Was ever better luck? By G—d, she's mine now!"

He shook his two men, who gasped stupidly, but sat up. Then he pushed on out through the open door, and found Barbara and the old landlord in the road. The landlord was declaring there was nothing he could do, when Mendenhall came up, crying out, "Stop your lying, you old fool! Why, Miss Fairfax, this is the best of all luck. Your horse lamed, well, you shall have mine. He isn't a lady's horse, but, by G—d, he shall carry you!"

Barbara was in a terror of affright at once. What had happened? Where had Mendenhall been? Had he discovered anything about Oliver? It was perfectly evident that he had been drinking.

"Are you alone?" she cried, betraying her fears in the tremor of her voice.

"I've a couple of orderlies within," he answered, hardly hiding the fiendish delight he took in her agitation. "I'll leave one of them here. He can fix your horse up and stay with it."

"Thank you," Barbara cried, deciding that her best course was to get away from him as quickly as possible. "I shall be glad to accept your horse."

"Don't say a word," he responded, trying to command

his voice, which was unsteady, and his language, which under the stress of his passionate purpose and the effect of the crude whiskey, had a direful tendency to run into profanity. "We're both bound the same way, and the jolly old rector,—he is a jolly old rector, isn't he, if he is your father?—he'll be devilish glad to see us safe home."

Barbara, perplexed by Mendenhall's behaviour, turned to the landlord, but the Colonel put his elbow into the old taverner's ribs with such emphasis and such a meaning look that he took himself out of sight hurriedly, gasping and vowing he'd double the reckoning, while he held his elbows tight to his sides, looking back furtively over his shoulder.

It was growing very dark, for the sobbing western wind, which had been murmuring in low gusts throughout the evening, had now risen to a steady moan; leaves were whirling up against the gloomy sky, and all the stars were rapidly disappearing in obscuring clouds.

With an effort to recover her composure, and struggling to make the best of the inevitable, Barbara suggested that they get away at once, for it threatened a storm.

"We'll be home before it," the Colonel laughed, with a ring of wild excitement reverberating in his voice.

The horses were got out and Barbara's saddle transferred. Presently they were mounted, the Colonel close to Barbara's side, his man a few paces in the rear.

They had moved away but a few rods from the lights of the tavern, when Barbara found something wrong

with the reins. She could not bring her horse ahead of the Colonel, nor swerve away from him.

She was frightened, but tried to allay her alarm by remembering that the Colonel, as a suitor for her hand, could only be anxious to see that she was safely brought home. Then she stretched her arm along the animal's neck and discovered a leading rein, which was evidently made fast to the Colonel's saddle horn.

"What do you mean?" she cried indignantly. "Do you think I'm a child?"

Now, Colonel Mendenhall, while resolving upon the most extreme measures to ensure his immediate possession of Barbara, was so confident of the power of his own charms, as to find it very difficult to believe Barbara altogether insensible to them, and so regarded it as the better policy, before forcing her assent, to give her at least the opportunity of being fairly wooed and won. He did not therefore irritate her by the blunt assertion that she was now in his hands, and the leading rein was to secure her from escaping him again. But instead, hastened to declare it was only the viciousness of the animal and his own great anxiety that Barbara should be safely restored to her people, that prompted him to take every possible precaution.

Just then a peal of distant thunder rolled in the rising wind, and Barbara saw nothing for it but to submit.

The Colonel was very close to her. She could not see the glowing flame kindling in his lustrous eyes, but she felt, with shrinking, the note of exuberant excitement in

his voice, as he checked the speed of the horses and began to remind her that lovers need not ride so far apart nor so fast.

"Don't annoy me, Colonel Mendenhall," she answered tartly. "You are a friend and we—we all like you. But there is nothing more between you and me. You know it!"

"By G—d, Barbara, you are too cruel with me." While the knowledge that he had her in his power tempted him to trifle a little, yet he was rapidly losing his self-control.

"I said lovers, and lovers we are!" he went on. "You swore to have me once, Barbara, you know that. And, by G—d, I'll never let you off."

A despair of mortification seized Barbara's heart. She again went through the harrowing attempt at explanation, but Mendenhall was now insolently indifferent to her wishes. He laughed at her refusals and treated her expressions of contempt for him with scorn. At last she schooled herself to bear it, as far as possible, with indifference, praying that Star Cross might be reached soon.

But the Colonel, in his present state of mind, interpreted her quietness as submission. He rushed on, from reminding her of the past, to pleading for the present.

In her distraction and through the increasing darkness, her horse being guided by his, Barbara did not discover that they left the homeward road till she was surprised at a sudden steep descent.

"What is this?" "Where are we?" she cried in real alarm. "We are on the wrong road!"

"Not a bit of it, Barbara! It's all right!" And the Colonel made his last effort to persuade her, using all the subtlety and winningness he could still command. "We cannot be lost while we are together. Trust to me. Trust me, Barbara, and all shall be well yet."

He drew their horses nearer and passed his arm round her. She struggled and called out. But before she could save herself her horse plunged aside, receiving a violent kick from his master, and Barbara found herself out of the saddle, and drawn closely in the Colonel's strong arms.

"By heaven, I saved you!" he cried, and holding her before him, he tried to press his hot lips to hers.

But Barbara, now thoroughly aroused to the danger that threatened her, struggled with such vigour that Mendenhall, shaken in his seat by the plunging of both horses, could not keep her before him, and she slid screaming to the ground, where she lay in a heap.

In a moment, however, Mendenhall and his man were lifting her up.

"Mine at last!" Mendenhall swore, with a great oath. "The sugar house, by the old ford, it's not ten rods. We'll carry her down there."

They reached the empty, bark-covered house, Barbara still bravely struggling and crying out.

Below the sugar house was the ford, at which Oliver and Toffy were searching for a boat. They were still pushing their way through the bushes at the edge of the

stream, when Barbara's cries caught their ears. At first they supposed some wounded animal was giving voice to its distress. But suddenly Toffy declared the screams were human. Then he fell to screaming himself, "It's Missy Babbie! It's Missy Babbie!"

At which Oliver started up the road, and burst out upon the opening in front of the sugar house just as Colonel Mendenhall was resting his precious burden at the door.

Nothing but blurred and indistinct forms could be seen on either side.

But few words were passed. Words of demand, of challenge, and Mendenhall began firing. Oliver, at all risk, leaped in to close quarters and grappled. Mendenhall struggled to level his pistol at Oliver's head. By good fortune, Oliver caught his wrist. They rolled together in a terrific grip, Mendenhall commanding his man to come up and "put a bullet in this devil's heart." The orderly did his best, but he could not see, and waited for the men to part.

Oliver, already wounded, felt his strength suddenly leaving him. He reeled and fainted.

As his grasp relaxed, Mendenhall started to his feet. At the same moment, seeing his opportunity, the orderly fired. In the darkness and half muddled with drink as he was, he had mistaken the men. Mendenhall gave a sharp cry, staggered forward and fell against the pistol, still smoking in his man's hand.

The man cried out: "Great God! Here's a night's work!" And, clutching Mendenhall in his arms, dragged him back to the horses.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE darkness of that terrible night deepened until it became impenetrable. The wind boomed in the trees. The peals of thunder, following each other more and more rapidly, gathered in power and intensity at every repetition, till one sustained, reverberating roar, broken by terrific crashes, filled the air.

Toffy, already deadly frightened at the firing in the dark, imagining himself shot through at each report, was flat on the ground, his face buried, his whole body quivering with successive prodigious sobs, or writhing with the sudden emission of a delirious scream.

Possibly the rain, which then began to descend, would have recalled him to sense and reason, but by this time Barbara found him and clung to him as at least a known protection between herself and the unspeakable horror in which she was darkly plunged.

This exhibition of emotion, so unusual on her part, acted like magic upon Toffy's extremely sensitive nature. If the black heavens had rolled apart and a vision of angels and cherubim suddenly appeared, smiling upon the smitten earth, he would not have been more surprised. His beloved mistress, whose shoes he blacked, whose least

command he obeyed, clinging to him! Looking to him for consolation and protection! His very soul expanded under the demand. Strength, which he could not compass for his own needs, now came to him to support her.

"O de blessed an' holy ones ob he'ben be praised, Missy Babbie," he cried, sitting up and gaping into the blackness around. "I dunno what's dun' happen. I dunno' wer' we's all goin'. But I do bless de Lord, Miss Babbie, fer all ob his wun'erful mercies. I do bless him fer you, Missy Babbie, an' I do bless him fer——"

The familiar sound of Toffy's voice, with its shambling, shuffling intonation, did more to restore Barbara's reason than anything he could say. She recovered herself enough to interrupt him sharply:

"Be quiet, Toffy. Get up, but don't let go my hand. If Colonel Mendenhall is—is here, you mustn't leave me!"

It was a terrible moment. More than life or death was at issue to Barbara. Her very soul shrank before the hideous fear of Mendenhall, which now appalled her. Hand in hand in the darkness they knelt, listening. A faint moaning was heard.

"Dar's one pusson livin'. De Lord hab mercy on him!" Toffy piously ejaculated.

Barbara turned quickly to the spot indicated by the sound of repeated groaning.

"Toffy," she cried, "keep with me, here, here!"

Together they discovered where Oliver lay and drew

him under the cover of the sugar house. He was unconscious.

"O, Marse Wentworth, Marse Wentworth," sobbed Toffy. "He was de most blessed friend ob de pore slave, he was de most kindest pusson to dis slave boy, I don' be willin' fer to die fer him, Missie Babbie, I don'!"

Barbara was trembling upon collapse. But Toffy rose to the emergency and continued hurriedly, "I'se gwine right off, dis minute, Miss Babbie; I'se gwine to dive through dis hyar black storm ob thunder and lightnings if de very he'ben tumbles top o' me. I'se gwine, Miss Babbie, I'se gwine!"

The brave hearted little black boy did the part of a hero that night. No one knew the terrible agony of fright it was to him to face thunder and lightning alone. Whenever such a storm came up, Toffy invariably hid himself in barn or cellar, or crept close to the kitchen fire. And now, to force his way in the face of it through the pitchy dark, with a tale of horror to tell which no one would be likely to believe, was a task, terrible beyond comprehension.

No sooner had Toffy set out than Barbara broke into a passionate agony of tears. Crouched upon the beaten floor of the rude shelter, she bent over Oliver's unconscious head. Again and again she spoke his name. Then listened with intense desire. The only response, his difficult uneven breathing. The storm shook the frail house and the sheets of bark, on walls and roof, rasped and gritted together like the teeth of an angry monster. One

quivering blaze of lightning lit the place for a lurid instant, and Barbara saw the pallid face of her beloved, and it bore the bloodless hue of death. She fell to kissing him. Tears, that drained her heart, sealing in sorrow the love he could not know.

She crooned over him, words of intense and tender passion. She cried to God to spare his life. She remembered all the moments of their past romantic meetings, since the first strange indelible instant, when, curiously peering through the block house window, her smitten eyes looked, abashed and condemned, into his. She remembered when he first thrilled her heart with gleams of the high purpose and noble aspirations possessing him. She thought of the dangers he had confronted, the pains he had borne.

Oh God, how good she would be to him, if this great, awful danger could be abated now. But he seemed sinking. The noise of the storm without was dying away. The thunder claps had ceased, and the fierce gusts of wind were subsiding. In the growing silence, Oliver's unnatural gasps for breath seemed more marked. The chill of the passing rain crept into Barbara's blood. She shivered. And once having done so had no power to regain her warmth. She sat, shaking and trembling. The moments seemed hours, the hours years. She lived a lifetime of fear, grief, and tortured anguish in the watches of that one night. Sometimes she fancied the figure of Mendenhall was stirring in the road, that he was speaking, rising, coming upon her! Still crouching, and

trembling in every limb, she dare not move. Numb and terrified, she waited, and waited.

When help came and men and a wagon arrived with lanterns and blankets, Barbara could neither weep nor call out. She was haggard and speechless and terribly changed.

The men were from a neighbouring sheep farm. They were good-hearted and willing, but sleepily slow to comprehend the situation. Toffy had exhausted every power of argument and oath he could command in inducing the men to brave the storm on such an errand. Now, however, that his story was shown to be no frenzied fabrication, the rough fellows did their best. They made haste to carry Oliver to the wagon, where Barbara was also placed, and driven under the now clearing sky to the village doctor, whose house lying to the east of Star Cross was nearer than the parsonage. Arriving there, however, the doctor was found to have gone on a distant emergency call beyond the village, so Oliver was brought to the parsonage, to the consternation of the good rector, the wonder but immediate motherly care of Mrs. Fairfax, and the quickened cynical interest of Phil.

Barbara's account of the villainous behaviour of Colonel Mendenhall, and Toffy's vivid description of the rescue effected by Oliver and himself, were received with very various effect by different hearers. Many thought the Colonel's conduct was not greatly to be wondered at, for there were well remembered incidents of the latent furious passion usually well hidden beneath the Colonel's

fine manners. Buford had already come so near to an open quarrel with his brother officer that he almost took this revelation of the other's treacherous nature to be a justification of his own feeling of bitter dislike which heretofore he feared might only be attributable to jealousy, he could not regret that Mendenhall had thus betrayed his real character, for it left the way free for him to throw his whole heart into the attempt to win Barbara for himself. What had become of Mendenhall was not yet known, but a report was generally believed that he was not mortally hurt, and that his man had succeeded in getting him out of the State.

For many days Oliver lay in unconscious stupor, hovering between life and death. Barbara haunted his room, an angel of patience and watchfulness. She was pale and thin, her eyes carried a hungering hope, ever lighting and fading. She lost her vivacity. The charm of her quick wit and ready tongue vanished. She scarcely spoke. But in her heart there was no silence; from the depths of her soul she offered a perpetual prayer.

Once, while she was sitting at the window, looking down upon the great tulip tree whose strangely awkward branches stretched far out over the smooth lawn, Oliver suddenly started from fretful rest, and called her name wildly. In a moment she was kneeling by the bed, her head bent over his hot hand, the tears streaming from her eyes. Unconsciously soothed by her touch, Oliver sank back again, grumbling at the noise of the storm, the darkness, the villainy of his foe.

When, however, returning strength and clearer consciousness began to reveal Oliver's recovery, Barbara's manner changed, and as soon as he was allowed to talk again, she forsook him.

The days of his slow convalescence were left, therefore, to pass with scarcely a sight of Barbara, a fear closely possessed her that she could not be near him alone without betraying that secret emotion which during the days of constant nursing had grown to passionate fulness. She kept away, and waited for the hope of what might be when his strength and her own self-restraint should have reasonably returned. Thus an opportunity presented itself to Phil, of which he was not slow to take advantage. By offering to play cribbage and dominoes with Oliver, he won the chance of skilfully insinuating such observations and reported such facts as he thought would serve to hasten Oliver's departure. He took particular delight in fabricating scenes in which Buford and Barbara played the chief parts, and finally went so far as to declare their engagement announced to the family.

"For Saints' spite! Don't think I approve it. D'ol take him, he's a puff ball, he's a prinkity pippin, a chaffinch in a uniform! Such stuffed priggishness makes me rile. But it's Babbie's choosing, 'taint mine. Say now, don't you breathe a word o' this. I ought to 'a kept quiet. It's a family secret, for a bit at least."

CHAPTER XXV

BARBARA meanwhile began to spend her days riding in long circuits that kept her from the house most of the time. In these rides she thought much of the strange events of the past months, she followed again and again the succession of experiences which had so affected her life. She dwelt greatly upon the deep devotion of Captain Brown to the cause of the slave. She thought of how much personal heroism he gave to the work, and yet how it ended disastrously. She remembered with remarkable vividness many of the words of that letter which Oliver called his commission, especially the words, "It cannot come easily, it must be bought with a price." And presently she indulged in a sort of vision of what might some day be. She well knew the faults of the negro, and she foresaw that which seemed to her of greater moment even than the question of slavery itself. She pictured the coloured children at school, the bright eyes gradually responsive to rising intelligence. She saw how much they ought to be taught, if they were to be fit for future freedom. This thought so held her that she determined to begin to apply it. She consulted her father, submitting her idea to his wise criticism, though binding him to secrecy until some-

thing had been fairly begun. The good rector promised all possible help, for the plan harmonised with his own view that there should be a gradual evolution out of the stricter forms of slavery towards a freer condition. Barbara took Toffy Moses very confidentially into her plans, and he accompanied her upon tours of the neighbourhood in search for a likely place for the establishment of some preliminary educational work. Such a place was soon found in a district where the slaves were exceptionally ignorant, yet where no objection to teaching them seemed likely to be made. In an abandoned cabin, used temporarily as a wayside shelter, Barbara improvised a sewing circle, a cooking school and a class in spelling and writing.

One day she had ridden over to this settlement and for several hours been busily illustrating the real difference between dirt and cleanliness, the advantages of keeping hens out of the pantry, and similar primary principles, when Toffy came breathlessly to the door and cried, with some excitement:

"Say dar', Missy Babbie! Wot you suppose? Dar' is Marse Oliver Wentworth, de Lord bless him, sure 's you're born, a comin' ridin' straight up dis h'yer hill."

Barbara's sleeves were rolled up. A plain white handkerchief was deftly tied about her coiled hair, illustrating to her turbaned auditors the possible neatness of a kitchen head-dress.

In either hand she held a skillet, one, ill-used, rough,

with old accumulations, the other also old, but shining, clean and commendable.

Thus she stood, taking in Toffy's distracting information. She could hear the sound of horse's hoofs striking the hard road. They ceased. There was no possible doubt that he had stopped. In a moment more they would be face to face.

Then a strange panic took possession of Barbara's heart. Her face tingled and flamed with sudden heat. There seemed no air to breathe, no firm ground beneath her feet. She dropped the skillets in the nearest mammy's lap, and turned, and disappeared.

There was a door behind her, and from it a little path led to a spring. Down that she fled. All about the spring the hickory trees, their masses of crimply foliage turned to golden bronze, threw a brilliant yellow haze in the burning noon.

The spring was set round with rough stones, over which cool mosses hung, and behind the moss the moist turf was brilliant with perennial verdure. A little bench stood against the bank, under the hickories, and here Barbara sat, breathless.

Oliver, letting his horse crop the grass, stood in the open door of the shed, all the wondering slave women rolling their shining eyes and smiling at his pale, handsome face.

It was the first time Oliver had been strong enough to ride out alone. Since his decision to bid adieu to the kindly hospitality of Star Cross rectory and return to his

home in the East, Barbara had succeeded in keeping entirely away from him, and today he had purposely searched for her.

As he stood in the doorway, Toffy flung himself in a beseeching attitude before him.

"Oh, Marse Wentworth," he cried, "de great Lord A'mighty be praised dat you'se yourself again, whole an' sound, whole an' sound. Praise de Lord, praise Him!"

"Hello, little dreamer," Oliver responded, "I expect I'm as pleased as anyone to be about again; but tell me this, have those guiding hands you talk about, that have brought us out of so many scrapes, led me the right way today? Is your mistress here? Is this her work? This?"

And Oliver looked about at the signs of practical education by which Barbara was striving to emancipate the dull, long-abased minds of the negroes.

"Come, Toffy, tell me, who is doing this?" with a gesture towards the benches and stove.

"Oh, Marse Wentworth, she am de perfec' angel ob light!"

"Ya'as! Ya'as! She am dat! Dat she am!" came in a chorus from the group of listening slaves.

"Where is she? What has become of her?" Oliver queried.

"For sure I don' 'low wh'ar she be," Toffy answered, evasively. "She w'ar h'yar, an' she's gon'. I 'spects some likely she don' want for to see no ones, specially you 'uns."

"I should like very much to know why that is, Toffy?"

"Wall, she am most partic'lar 'bout keepin' off int'ruptions to de class. An' I reckon you'se a most 'tic'lar int'rupter. I some doubt she's gwine to giv' me hard words fer lettin' you in h'yar."

But Oliver's impatience could no longer endure this circumlocution, and seeing the door in the rear of the shed ajar, in spite of Toffy's expostulating ejaculations, he pushed out, and hastened along the path, which appeared to be the only exit.

After a momentary hesitation Toffy closed the door as Oliver disappeared, saying:

"Guess you niggers stay right h'yar till Missy Babbie come back."

In a moment Oliver, looking expectantly before him, saw Barbara. Her dark hair was loosened and half freed from its coils. She had caught the white handkerchief hurriedly from her head and was knotting it in trembling excitement. Her eyes were downcast, but her red lips could be seen pressing upon each other, in an alarmed and smileless way. Seeing her thus, Oliver's heart leapt with joy at the sight.

Suddenly Barbara looked up. She had rapidly planned in her mind how she would treat him, how quietly she would demean herself, that he might by no means detect her agitation. There was something in his actual presence which always seemed to draw the veil from her soul, but this time she would be prepared, and if,—if as her heart bade her hope,—but she must be certain of much more than she now was before she listened to him. No

sooner did she see him, however, than she fell again before the old emotion, and more hopelessly than ever. She forgot her own sense of guarded pride, her previous humiliations, as she looked upon his pale face, with its surprisingly sorrowful and worn expression, pathetically held in check by that strength of will which had already forced the issues of his life.

"All my careful avoidance of him," she thought, "my plans to keep him from being compelled to express his gratitude, were thrown away. He never cared for me. He thinks only of how he can get himself killed in foolish attempts to break our old established institutions."

He did not smile at her tumbled hair, her shining eyes, or the knotted handkerchief nervously fumbled in her hands. They both seemed unconscious of the immediate circumstances, as they were equally indifferent to the glory and beauty of the sun-bathed sylvan grove in which they met.

"I hope you will pardon me," he began. "I ought not to break in upon your work like this, but—"

"Please make no apology at all, Mr. Wentworth," she hastily answered, all her manner showing her sincerity. "I was only so surprised at your sudden appearance. I never thought of you finding me, out here, and I didn't know, I had no idea you were able yet to be about again. Are you really strong enough? You look so tired, won't you sit down and rest a while?"

But Oliver realised the temptation which beset him, and sternly proceeded with his purpose.

"I am quite strong again. So strong, indeed, that no possible excuse remains for the continuance of my long, taxing strain upon the hospitality of your people, who have been so very kind to me."

Barbara look up at him quickly, apprehensively. Did he mean that he was going away?

"I go tonight," he continued. "A sudden opportunity has offered itself for me to take a law practice in Washington, which I have decided to accept, and so I broke in upon you here, Miss Fairfax, only because I did not want to leave Star Cross without expressing directly to yourself my sincere congratulations upon your engagement. I am sure Colonel Buford is certain to be worthy of your confidence, much as he is himself to be congratulated upon his great good fortune."

Barbara flushed crimson, and her dark eyes flamed with what for the moment threatened to be uncontrollable indignation. Her excess of emotion, however, temporarily prevented utterance, and her astonishment at the extraordinary assumption which Oliver seemed to take so assuredly baffled her reason. Oliver, however, at once accredited her silence and heightened colour to modest embarrassment, and only blamed himself for too abruptly broaching such a subject, especially as his information coming from Master Phil, it was presumable that the engagement was still known only to the immediate family.

He had planned to say some very proper and polite things, to speak as calmly as he might of his own assured and lasting personal interest in Miss Fairfax's hap-

piness, of the strange experiences they had shared together, in which he had found revelations of life he should never be able to forget, and many other things, intending at least to let her know that the charm and power of her own person had left within his heart an emotion which would always remain, but suddenly he felt his physical weakness unequal to the strain of contending emotions; he felt tottering upon a dizzy brink. Bitterly as he denied it to himself, he was helplessly and passionately in love with the girl before him. His thought of her had been sufficiently hopeless heretofore; he had always recognised the insuperable obstacles between them, but now as it came to acknowledging that forever there was an end to all lover's hope, the words refused to be spoken. In blind stupidity, feeling every moment a tightening pain at his head, his heart, his throat, he thrust forth his hand with a clumsy cry of "Goodbye."

Had he asked her anything, had he given her an opportunity to tell him the truth, he might have saved himself. But he would not break down before her, and being conscious that the end of the interview was separation in any case, of what avail further words, therefore he cried again, "Goodbye!" and turned and half ran, half staggered back across the open space into the cabin, where the astonished scholars looked at his haggard face in amazement. Without heeding them, however, he passed out, dragged himself into the saddle, and was gone.

Barbara called to him once, but the throbbing in his head and ears beat back the sound which might have

blessed him forever. Thinking him insufferably perverse, thinking him insolent in his daring assumption, and his cold farewell, Barbara gazed blankly at the shimmering sun-filled space before her, and then sank to the ground with a great cry, falling into convulsive weeping, while she knew not whether it was for indignation, rage, or love.

Oliver rode on and on. He took no note of the way. Slowly his reason and self-possession returned. He drew up under a giant maple tree and tried to realise where he was.

While he sat perplexed, still half indifferent to time and place, hoof beats struck upon his ear, and presently the familiar form of the dapper little cheery-hearted Virginian Colonel Buford appeared, mounted upon his famous dappled gray. Seeing Oliver, Buford called out with pleasure, for he had been to the parsonage and heard of Oliver's purpose to return immediately to the East.

"D—n it! You know, I hope you don't think we Southerners are all like the freebooter sort of rascal you have seen employed across the border! Most of us think we have the right of it, of course, in the maintenance of our settled institutions, but I tell you, Wentworth, if we could see the way to accomplish it, there are a good many of us who would welcome a condition of affairs which dispensed with slavery. Men like Lee, and Wise, and others I personally know, hold that opinion. But the Lord only knows how it will ever come about."

Oliver answered something vaguely; he was staring at the Colonel with far other thoughts coursing through his fevered brain. This was the man to whom the propitious fates granted the priceless boon of Barbara's love!

"Well!" the Colonel resumed, settling himself to ride forward, "next time we meet I, for one, hope it will be as friends."

Pleasantly meant there was a very different suggestion in those words to Oliver, and the absurd irritation of jealousy they aroused, served to quicken his attention.

"As, however, we may never meet, Colonel," he said with a keen and rather pointed accent, "before we part, let me proffer my congratulations!"

"Thank you; on the success of our cause?"

"Indeed no; on happier grounds; on the success of your personal interests; your engagement!"

"By the Saints, Wentworth!" the Colonel cried, flushing. "I don't know what you mean, but it sounds d—d impertinent!"

At this Oliver urged his horse towards the Colonel's and spoke with tightening lips.

"Take it as you choose, my purpose is fair enough, and I see no impropriety in congratulating any man who has been so immensely fortunate as to win the hand you have."

The Colonel, staring hard at Oliver's strained and unnatural expression, suddenly conceived the idea that he was not yet really recovered from the hallucinations of

his recent illness. He knew that Oliver had been for weeks in the most serious mental condition, and he at once resolved to treat him with quiet consideration.

"My conscience, Wentworth! Don't take offence, I would be glad enough, the Lord knows, to accept your congratulations. I only wish the conditions warranted me in doing so!"

"The conditions?" Oliver queried impatiently. "Is it not true that you have been accepted by—by Miss Fairfax?"

"I wish with all my heart it were. But if you insist upon it, why, by Jove, we'll hope it is true."

"Phil told me."

"Phil told you? Oh Lord, that boy; he's the brother of an angel, but as like one himself as hell's like heaven. He lied to you for some ends of his own, but to tell you the truth, Wentworth, I am on my way now to meet Miss Fairfax, and if I should see you again before you leave us, I hope by all the hosts of cherubim and seraphim, you may congratulate me in sober truth."

In a few more words Buford informed Oliver that the grassy road he was on was a short cut across to Star Cross, and he had only to keep in the direction his horse had already taken to reach the village in the shortest possible time. Then the Virginian rode on, determined to bring his own hopes to an immediate issue, in spite of the very evident disinclination which Barbara had lately shown to receiving his attentions.

Oliver, again left alone, sat for some moments listening

to the rapid hoof beats of the Colonel's horse. A strange tumult of sensations puzzled his will. Finally a sense of impotent weakness, of dizzy uncertainty flooded his brain, he slowly dismounted, and, hitching his horse, lay down under the sweeping branches of the maple.

The deep silence soothed him, but there was a pulsing fear in his brain, a sense of wonder and suspense that kept him sensitive to every passing motion. He saw the fringe of leaves lifting and sinking their fingered edges in the balmy air. He felt the flutter of wings far above him as the cardinal birds flew in and out. And beyond the shade he was conscious of the leap of a rabbit hurriedly across the sunny lane, and the call of a male grouse deep within the woods startled him as though it were human. In the agitation of his mind the passing moments presently became unbearable, it seemed hours before the sound of galloping hoofs thudding in the distance held his eager attention.

It was Buford riding fast. He pulled in when he discovered Oliver and cried to him to come on, and he would pilot him home. But Oliver declared he should not return till it was cooler.

"Well," Buford cried, "as you will. I am no amiable companion just now. Congratulations are not in order," and so saying, he spurred on again.

Then Oliver sprang quickly to his feet. There was light in his eye, colour on his thin cheek, and an air of sudden determination, clothing him with new grace. In a few moments he was mounted and riding back towards

her from whom he had so recently parted with breaking heart.

Presently he came in sight of Toffy, but he was alone. Riding up, Oliver demanded in quivering voice for what reason he had left his mistress.

"Missie Babbie, she don' send me on for 'ticular purpose. Missie Babbie she don' say she sure for certain want not to see you. She 'ticular want not to see you any more again, sor, she don' tell me fifty dozen times."

Oliver broke into a laugh, wild and strange, at the same moment swinging his horse into the gallop, he left Toffy bewildered.

Barbara had dismounted and was seated on a fallen moss-covered butternut tree that lay along the roadside.

When she saw Oliver approaching she stood up and turned her back upon him. Leaping from the saddle, Oliver dared a perilous danger; he took an angry woman in his arms against her will. She did not cry out. For one instant she was rigid, but his touch, the kiss upon her burning cheek went like magic through her veins, and a deep, deep joy flamed up in her soul and filled her whole being with rapture. Then he drew her towards him, so tenderly, so softly, till he could look into her eyes! He gave a quick glad cry, while she hid her face from him, pressing it against his breast.

For a long time they could not get beyond this first step of their sudden love making, but by and by Oliver murmured against her cheek:

"It must be, dearest, say it must be!"

"Who told you I loved you?" she asked innocently. All the strength of his soul was in his eyes as he answered.

"I think it was God. It must have been. He kept me alive for this."

Then she lifted her face and when he urged her again to say those simplest yet sweetest words of any tongue and every age, she was humble and obedient.

So little Toffy came sheepishly back and found them quite unconscious of his presence, folded in each others' arms. His round shining eyes grew like moonstones with wonder and awe, they rolled in his head till the whites gleamed spectrally. Then he backed away slowly till he was safely out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVI

MAMMY MINE, in the neatest of white caps and nurse's aprons, was swaying with measured steps back and forth, along the wide vine-covered veranda of a handsome residence on one of the west side streets in the city of Washington. When Barbara Fairfax became Mrs. Wentworth, old man Moses and Mammy Mine, with little Saphronia, were sent for to come to the young couple's new home at the capital. Oliver gained almost at once one of those rare social and legal successes by which a man is suddenly sought after, for innumerable professional and public services, whether through the special adaptability of his own talents, the unselfish efforts of his influential friends, or the charm and admirable tact of his wife, can never be determined.

It was three years since the incidents in the border warfare along the Osage and the Ossawattomie which led to the romantic episode in Oliver Wentworth's career, and for the last two years Mammy Mine had her hands full in the personal ceaseless care of a golden-haired, round-faced, plump-legged boy, now two years old, and a sweet angel-eyed baby girl, for whose soothing delight she was now solemnly pacing upon that endless march

which in the humble devotion of her heart never wearied her. Old man Moses sat in a big chair, smoothing a folded newspaper that he held tightly, as some precious and mysterious living thing. The old man was no scholar, but the contents of that paper he had memorized through repeated hearing. Now he brooded over it, and every few moments a sob, or a tear hurriedly wiped away, gave evidence of his emotion.

"Hav' don', Moses, hav' don'," mammy exclaimed as she reached his end of the veranda. "Ain't you shamed to be cryin' 'gainst de Lord that way? De Lord giv' an' takes away. It's mighty pore religion to sot up 'gainst Him!"

"I ain't a sottin' up mammy, no I ain't, but it's like as though my old heart wer' a breakin'."

On the paper he held, the black lined heading "Harper's Ferry," sufficiently suggested the cause of the old man's grief.

"Theophilus!" he called out, as he caught sight of Toffy, now a tall, trimly dressed youth, passing through the garden, "I don' like to hav' you come hyar!"

And Toffy, tender towards his father's emotion, read over to him once more, the account of that astonishing and tragic attack. Of how without a single gunshot, swiftly in perfect order, with no wilful damage, the whole town was held by Brown's diminutive army of twenty men. Of how they took possession of the armoury and held it against all the local militia which could be mustered. Of the arrival of a company of United States

marines under Colonel Robert E. Lee, and how the summons to surrender was promptly declined. Cut down, stabbed, covered with wounds, his white beard clotted with gore, the champion of the slave was taken at last. Old man Moses could not see that this extraordinary act on the part of Brown, and the very fact that he had failed in it, and was to be hanged for it, was in reality the lightning flash before the storm, revealing the crisis at hand, which was to test the heart of the nation; to him it seemed the wreck of all hope for the freedom of his race.

Oliver Wentworth had known nothing of the desperate venture at Harper's Ferry until the reports appeared in the papers. Dumbfounded as he was at Brown's extraordinary act, he had immediately exerted himself in every way to obtain a pardon for the man whom he knew to be at heart a seer, a prophet, and a true servant of the Eternal God. But the moving destiny of the nation was not thus to be avoided. The great freedom was yet to be bought with a price. When nothing more could be done, Oliver went to Charlestown and visited John Brown in prison, where the old Captain, scarred and weak, yet thrilling still with the passionate hope which had led him so long, urged Oliver to prepare for the greater effort to which the nation must now be roused, declaring cheerfully that by his own death he was certain he should be serving the cause of God and humanity better than by whatever he had attempted during his life.

When's Marse Wentworth 'spected home again?" Moses asked after the emotion aroused by Toffy's reading had somewhat subsided.

"Missie Babby she's some 'spectin' him dis noon time," Mammy responded.

A few hours later Oliver was clasping his wife to his heart, and there were tears in her eyes, when after telling her that all was over for their old friend, the stern Puritan Captain, he said tenderly:

"We at least shall never forget him, shall we, Barbara?"

THE END